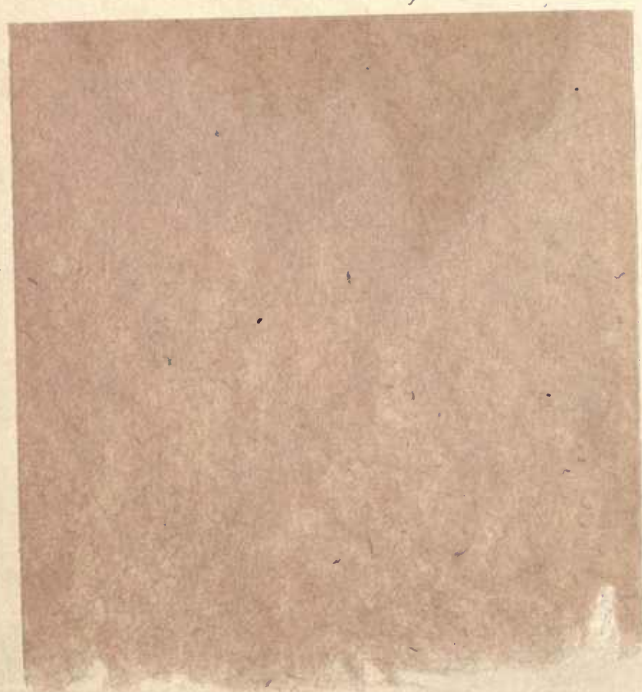


OUR MISS YORK

EDWIN BATEMAN MORRIS



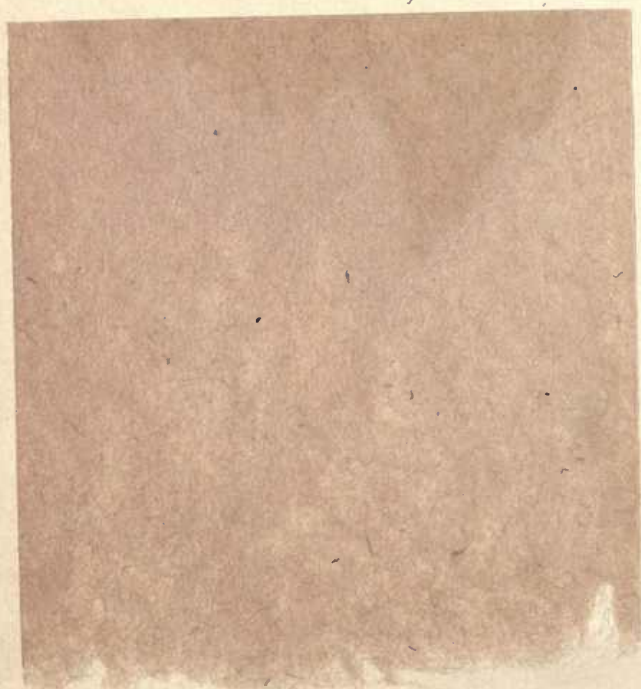
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OUR MISS YORK

By

EDWIN BATEMAN MORRIS

Author of

Blue Anchor Inn, The Millionaire, Etc.

Illustrated by
COLES PHILLIPS AND
RALPH L. BOYER

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Our Miss York

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Our Miss York

Our Miss York

CHAPTER I

THE OLD GARDEN—SPRING

FROM many points of view it was a shocking costume for a young and attractive girl to wear ; but it might be said, if it is a proper statement to make, that she was the more attractive on that account. The stockings she wore stopped at, or a little below, her shins, and accentuated their brevity by a pink band at the top. The skirt, if it could be called a skirt, approached her knees as a limit, but never quite reached them. And between showed her own fair figure, round and decidedly pink. She was not conscious of any impropriety in her attire, and rocked in her chair on the uneven bricks, humming blithely to herself. For she was but three years old ; and her mind had not yet grasped all the intricacies of the scale that runs between proper and improper,

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nor learned the difficult art of knowing when to be shocked and when not to be shocked.

By the side of the herring-bone brick walk on which her tiny chair oscillated with a regular noise like a grandfather's clock, a companionable robin, an old friend recently returned from his fashionable winter in the South, searched persistently over the turf for the descendants of worms he had eaten in years past. He paid little attention to her. This had been his home long before it had been hers. He had known the herring-bone walk almost before it had lost the first flush of its youth and taken on its tinge of mossy green. The parallel lines of box hedge running beside it had been familiar partitions in his summer house for many a day. Many a thousand times had he started at the creak of the garden gate, and, as it closed automatically upon request of the weight attached to it, speculated with a primitive caution on the purpose of the stranger who had entered.

And when the tiny child had first come, with her pink hair ribbon and her pink sash and her pink cheeks, he had looked at her somewhat askance, as an invader in his domain. But they had presently grown used to each other and he had agreed to the

THE OLD GARDEN—SPRING

establishment of an *entente cordiale* which permitted them to engage in the pursuit of happiness over the same area. And as his pursuit of happiness consisted in searching for worms, and hers in inducing sleep in various well beloved doll-babies, their aims did not clash.

Just now the sun was sinking low and she was giving way to the fatigue of the long day. A faint breeze blew from the west, carrying with it the touch of fragrance of freshly-bloomed flowers. A stray wood-thrush, perching himself somewhere out of sight in the trees, sang his liquid song to her. Her doll lay in her arms. She crooned sleepily.

“ Wock-a-bye bee-by
Wock-a-bye bee-by
Ta-adle will fall,
Wock-a-bye bee-by.”

The robin hopped confidently up the path. Overhead, against the even blue of the sky, she saw other birds flying. Her voice trailed off into silence. Childish thoughts passed through that young mind : thoughts of vague golden days to come ; of possible adventurous journeys in street-cars ; of visits to a place once seen where iron dogs guarded the front

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lawn ; of great soap-bubbles to be blown upon the occasion of the next rainy day. Glorious reveries these !

So absorbed was she in these colorful thoughts that she did not note the opening of the door behind her and did not therefore see the gentleman who stood there more than a little startled at her small presence. A red-faced gentleman of about fifty he was—immaculately dressed in a check suit of distinctly audible pattern, with a faultlessly arranged tie of bright hue and faultlessly shining shoes. He was of that aggressive type one calls man-about-town, for want of a better term, noted in many places for his poise and self-possession. And yet he stood there now in a fit of buck ague, terror-stricken at the sight of this tiny being beneath its pink hair ribbon—afraid to retreat, unwilling to advance. It was the first time he had been alone in its presence. He did not wish to ignore it, yet what remark could he address to it? He was just about to steal silently away when a nurse, bearing the child's supper, appeared and rescued him.

While the supper was being arranged in the proper manner on a tiny table set on the bricks, he seated himself in his big armchair on the porch and took

THE OLD GARDEN—SPRING

a cigar from its case. But he did not smoke. He held it in his hand staring at it thoughtfully.

"Miss Martin," he said to the nurse, as she ascended the steps.

"Yes, Mr. Lacey."

"How can I go on with this confounded business? Me, a guardian of a child—a baby! Why, I am as well fitted for it as I am to be a snake charmer. Suppose I came out on this porch some day and that organism out there began to cry. What the dickens could I do? How could I stop it?"

Miss Martin laughed. "You don't have to. That's what I'm for."

He drew a heavy sigh.

"But there might come a time," he asserted, "there might come a time. I should want to do the proper thing by my sister's child. Confound it!" he cried, "what sin have I committed that I should be saddled with a baby—when up until a month ago I hardly knew such a thing existed."

"It's your own niece," she reminded him.

"Yes, yes. Blood is thicker than water," he exclaimed.

He gazed thoughtfully at the end of his cigar.

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"Well," he said at length, gloomily, "you are my hope and my refuge."

She smiled and rose to go. She had been a hospital nurse, to whom after the news of the death of this sister and brother-in-law, and of his own consequent inheritance of their parental responsibility he had turned, in a state of panic, and persuaded to accept the position of nurse, governess and mother to the child.

He gazed gloomily at the infant. He had not strained her to his bosom from choice. She had come like some dread ailment that there was no avoiding. She interfered with his quiet and his comfort. He had had to give up his bedroom to her because it was sunny. Her toys were in his library. And he did not love children. He rose and descended the steps with a gouty heaviness and visited the first bloom of a red poppy in the flower garden beside the house.

He had planted this particular kind of poppy many times, but this was the first occasion on which he had been rewarded with a bloom. He returned to the house and expressed a wish rather glumly that the child should not be allowed to touch the flower.

When Margaret had finished her meal, she took

THE OLD GARDEN—SPRING

off her bib and folded it up carefully in an approved manner. The little spoon she put in the little cup, and the cup she put in the bowl and the bowl she placed upon the folded bib. Her ritual of tidiness was then complete, and she was ready for bed.

At that moment the latch of the front gate clicked and there appeared on the bricks of the walk a very large man and a little four-year-old boy in a white sailor's suit and black patent leather pumps. The light of recognition was in Margaret's eye. She trotted eagerly down the path, her shoes clicking on the bricks, running very fast until she got almost to them, and then stopping suddenly, abashed at her own boldness, with her hands behind her.

"Hello, Margaret," said the boy, in a deep voice.

"Hello, lil' David Bruce," she returned, with some shyness, but favoring him with his full name.

The boy covered up his embarrassment by running away and swinging on the front gate, but returned presently with a show of nonchalance and an eye roving in search of diversion. He seized the other child by the hand presently and announced that he was going with her to pick flowers. Margaret looked at Miss Martin for permission, which that lady gave.

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"Pick daffodils—with long stems," she explained.

The children went hand in hand down the gravel path.

Margaret thrust her hand down deep and plucked a flower with a long stem. The boy David did the same. She went on picking carefully and methodically. He soon tired, and found it more diverting to pull the flowers with no stems at all.

"Oh, Davie boy, they haven't *any* stems," she remonstrated.

"Don't like stems," he observed.

He stalked to the end of the path and gazed at the red poppy.

"I'm going to pick the red one."

"No," she cried, aghast.

He observed the flower thoughtfully. Fascinated at his daring she stood behind him watching him. Presently he swooped down and tore it from its stem. Looking it over curiously for a moment, he threw it down on the ground. There they found them after a while, Margaret endeavoring to plant the poor poppy again in the ground, and David, standing with both feet in the daffodils watching her interestedly.

THE OLD GARDEN—SPRING

“There you have it,” said David’s father, “the Waster and the Producer.”

Whereupon he immediately took the Waster home. Mr. Lacey made a wry face and, turning ill-humoredly upon his heel, stalked into the house, where he growled and grumbled for the rest of the evening. Providence had visited his house with a plague.

CHAPTER II

THE GARDEN—SUMMER

SUMMER in Mr. Lacey's garden. But many a spring has passed since the days that he brooded over his responsibility for the small child. There is no small child now. But a slim girl of eighteen cares for an old gentleman who sits in his chair beneath the shade of the trees, reading his papers or testily rapping on the balustrade of the porch for some one to come and minister to his wants. In sixteen years he had turned from a hale middle-aged man to a mere feeble, tottering invalid.

It is ten years now since he gave up his business in the city—or since he was rather blasted from that business by an upheaval that left him high and dry and far away, with all his confidence, his nerve and his poise gone forever. When he had been content in his broker's office to sit still and take his steady commission for buying and selling, buying and selling, all the year round, he had grown rich. But when he decided that he would join the throng of operators, the people who placed their money on

THE GARDEN—SUMMER

the turn of the wheel, he plunged presently down the abyss on whose edge he had stood safe and unharmed all the years of his life. It was a great boom in copper that caught him. He thought he saw a chance for his hundred thousand dollars to become a million. He thought he had plotted correctly the future of the market. But he parted from his hundred thousand, and more that he had borrowed, just at the wrong time, and in eight days not a penny of it was left. He sold his seat in the stock exchange—the seat that he had inherited from his father—and in the end saved enough money out of the wreck to barely keep him. All of his poise and most of his self-esteem gone, he retired to his home, which thereafter he rarely left for any cause whatever.

The child Margaret was left to her own devices. Miss Martin was dismissed immediately as being too expensive. Margaret was just at an age when she could take care of herself, and so long as she did not annoy him, he was well pleased. Few playmates came up the path between the box hedges, for they annoyed the aging man. The child's diversion was with the old negro mammy in the kitchen. There she would stand on a wooden box by the kitchen sink, a long checkered apron about her

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neck, and wash dishes and pots and pans. When she grew older she was allowed to cook, following old Elizabeth's guesswork recipes. And then on her seventeenth birthday she had gone to Mr. Lacey and explained with a certain old-fashioned seriousness that it was not economical to order food from the store by telephone and pay for it when the bill came at the end of the month. She announced that she wanted to take hold of the household and do the marketing. The old gentleman had grunted doubtfully but had handed over the sum she named for the first month's allowance.

That was the only means by which she had in any way endeared herself to him. For she had thus saved him money and at the same time managed to give him better food. These two things were now the only avenues of approach to his soul, and even they did not extend far beneath his skin.

Out of this allowance for the household, the girl saved enough for her clothes, an item for which heretofore Mr. Lacey had never voluntarily made an appropriation. This saved her much embarrassment, for her guardian had never made asking for favors pleasant, and seemed to have a masculine inability to realize that the protecting of the female from the

THE GARDEN—SUMMER

winter's blast requires a more or less steady outlay of funds. The exigencies of the case required that she make all her dresses herself, with the aid of a seamstress who came in by the day. But they by no means suffered on that account. Indeed, to the youths, who now began to come and sit with her on the stone steps in the moonlight, they could not have been more exquisite.

As the old gentleman began to grow older and more and more feeble, she saw, with an insight somewhat beyond her years, that there would sooner or later come a time when the light would be snuffed out and she would be thrown upon her own resources. Therefore one afternoon as he sat in his chair beneath the trees, wrapped in his shawl against the light summer breeze, she took her sewing and sat down beside him. He looked at her distrustfully with his beady black eyes.

"Well, well," he said, touchily, "I don't have to be sat with. I'm not an invalid."

"I know," she said, and went on featherstitching. He continued to regard her resentfully.

"Guardian," she observed, presently, "hadn't I better be thinking of a way to earn my living?"

He struck his cane down into the turf.

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“What’s this?” he exclaimed. “Aren’t you satisfied with the way you are living here?”

“Perfectly. But this can’t last forever.”

“When I am dead and gone,” he said bluntly, “it is time to think of those things. Don’t bury me in advance.”

She continued to sew.

“I could perhaps learn something to fit me to earn my living. I could perhaps take up stenography.”

“I don’t want you to be a stenographer,” he blurted out. “Stenographer! Do you suppose I want every one to say I couldn’t support you? Bah!”

He rose unsteadily to his feet. He pointed to the street outside the garden wall.

“Do you know what they call me out there? Down-and-out Lacey!” he exclaimed. “Nothing would please them better than to say my niece was supporting me by the labor of her hands.” He shook a wavering stick at the street beyond. “Vultures,” he cried, “vultures!”

He tottered to the steps of the house. She put down her sewing to help him. He passed into the house saying over and over to himself, “Down-and-out Lacey! Down-and-out Lacey!”

THE GARDEN—SUMMER

She returned and sat a long while thoughtfully silent under the trees. Then she rose and walked slowly toward the flower garden, bright with its burden of nasturtiums and its regular beds of zinnias and larkspur and bachelor's buttons ; and still brighter beyond with golden glow and startling red amaryllis, and with hollyhock and sunflowers towering above—all like a very rich and colorful impressionist picture. In an octagonal pool at the end of the gravel path bloomed white water-lilies, their shining wet foliage resting on the water ; and five big goldfish scurried about among their stems. This was the spot she came to for companionship.

Her observing eye discovered dead leaves to be plucked here, and insidious weeds to be exterminated there. She stooped down to gather nasturtiums that must be picked to prevent them from going to seed. A step sounded on the gravel behind her. She glanced up.

"Hello, David," she said.

He took off his hat. "Perhaps you need an assistant gardener," he suggested.

"I do. Wouldn't you like to pick a few nasturtiums?"

"With all my heart. The fewer the better."

OUR MISS YORK

She smiled. He sat down upon a convenient square of greensward and began to gather flowers. At least he picked one which he put in his button-hole, and another which he twirled in his fingers. He watched her with interest.

"You are always plucking," he observed with the cheerful ease of a person watching another engaged in toil, "where something ought to be plucked and creating where something ought to be created."

She smiled at this compliment—so manifestly untainted with envy.

"Doesn't it serve as an example to you?" she replied, with an effort to be severe.

"Why no. You see I picked flowers the last time I was here. I must have change."

"Change," she repeated, mockingly. "Always change. You have the soul of a chameleon."

"A chameleon's soul is steadfast," he corrected. "It is only his skin that changes."

He picked a stone from the walk and tossed it into the pool, where it disappeared with a tiny splash and left a hundred concentric circles on the surface.

"Outwardly I seem to be changing," he asserted. "But within I think I am going straight. I have to try various things to find out what I like."

THE GARDEN—SUMMER

"Is it true that you have decided to give up your engineering?" she asked.

He made an oratorical gesture with his flower.

"Yes. I find I am no engineer."

"But I thought you had made such a good record."

"I made a good enough record," he conceded.

"But I don't like the work."

"Couldn't you have guessed that before? You've wasted a whole year of your life."

He rose and strode up and down the gravel walk.

"Indeed I've not. I've added just so much to my fund of general knowledge. And I know now I do not want to be an engineer—which is a valuable piece of information."

"I can't break down your optimism," she exclaimed, at length. "But what *are* you going to do?"

David handed her his offering of one nasturtium for her bunch.

"The widow's mite," he explained. "Why," he continued, "I'm going to Paris to study painting."

"David!" she cried.

"Why not? I've always wanted to."

"But it's so different from civil engineering."

"Yes. I think that is in its favor."

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"Do you know, David," she said, rising and dusting off her skirt, "you proceed through life by taking one step in one direction and the next step in the opposite direction."

"I know," he agreed, but did not attempt to discuss the point.

She sat down on a bench under the trees, and her usually busy hands lay idle in her lap.

"How does it happen," he exclaimed, with a show of astonishment, "that you are not sewing or mixing mayonnaise or something?"

"Oh, sometimes," she replied, "I'm quite human."

He sat upon the stone steps.

"When are you going?" she asked, presently.

"I leave here day after to-morrow."

She gazed thoughtfully for a while at her hands in her lap.

"Of course we shall miss you," she said.

"'We' used in the editorial sense?" he inquired.

"The community at large," she replied, waving her hand.

"Please thank them for me."

They were silent. He shot a twig at a robin hopping close by the hedge.

"Tell me this," she asked, "do you really think



“OF COURSE WE SHALL MISS YOU”

THE GARDEN—SUMMER

you have the—the divine fire in you, or do you simply feel you need a change of scene?"

He considered a moment.

"Of course I always want a change of scene. But aside from that I'm enthusiastic about this thing. I've drawn pictures ever since I was old enough to sit up alone. If I hadn't happened to go out with that engineering corps last summer, I never would have thought of being anything else but a painter."

Margaret smiled at him.

"What does your superior smile mean?" he asked.

"When you are crossing over," she replied, "don't permit yourself to be shown the workings of the ship. You'll be a naval architect if you do."

After they had talked for a long while and the shadows of the trees began to lengthen on the grass, he rose to go. And there was in his manner a lingering reluctance, as though he wished to make the most of the moment. Perhaps the same thought was uppermost in the mind of each—that this was the last day of their child youth. He was going forth now into the world as a man, to hunt for his burden and take it up. And when he returned, he

OUR MISS YORK

knew that it was not improbable she too might have gone forth on a like mission.

When he had shaken hands with her, a sense of comradeship prompted her to walk down the brick walk with him. She picked a flower from the bed by the gate and, bidding him stand still, reached up and drew it through his buttonhole. And she laughed, because she could not have denied there was a certain heaviness in her heart.

"That was a most flirtatious thing to do," she exclaimed, smiling, "but—may it bring you good luck."

"I like you to be flirtatious," he said.

She made a mouth at him.

"In that case I must try not to be."

Still some time later he was holding her hand for a brief moment again across the swinging gate.

"Good-bye," she said. "Come back soon."

Then she returned to the chair under the trees, and picked up her sewing. The robins hopped about on the grass beside her. She stared absently at them. In her lap rested idly the usually busy hands and the sewing with its needle thrust into it lay untouched on her knee.

CHAPTER III

THE GARDEN—AUTUMN

THE red and russet and golden leaves spread out all over the lawn and the paths and the flower beds. The gaunt limbs of the trees were showing brown and bare against the sky, and from the street could now be seen the outlines of the house. The leaves rustled underfoot. First frost had bitten the flowers. A general air of sombre quiet lay on the garden that even the Indian summer sun did not seem to dispel.

Mr. Lacey's chair was not in its accustomed place on the lawn. Nor was it indeed upon the porch where it had usually been in years past after the ground had grown too damp for him. The benches had been taken in and the shutters were closed.

Upon the stone steps, her chin upon her hand, sat Margaret, in black; and the clear whiteness of her skin and the rose of her cheeks stood out well against it. She was twenty now, and a trifle more rounded and matured. She sat with her back against a

OUR MISS YORK

column, glancing every now and then at the street as if she were expecting some one.

In a few moments an automobile appeared and came to a stop at the gate. Two men were in it. One of them stepped out and spoke a few words to the other, who nodded, and, starting the machine, drove away again. It was a big man who opened the gate and came up the path. He carried with him his lawyer's green bag, which, like everything that came in contrast with him, seemed lilliputian in its smallness. This was David Bruce's father.

"My dear Margaret," he said, "I have no very good news for you. Lacey's will leaves everything to you, but that everything turns out to be very little."

"I expected that," she replied.

Mr. Bruce nodded.

"As you doubtless know," he continued, "he had been drawing on his principal for a long while, and at his death he had nearly exhausted it. If he had lived another year I do not know what there would have been for him to live on. As it is, you have just about an even thousand dollars, which I am thankful to say we shall be able to place almost immediately at your disposal."

THE GARDEN—AUTUMN

"You are very kind," she said.

"I think," she went on presently, "I have just about decided upon my plan of action. Last year I suggested to Mr. Lacey that I study stenography in order to be prepared for such a turn of events as this. He would not hear of it, but I still think that that is the best thing for me to do, as I have now my living to earn."

Mr. Bruce stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said, "I think that is the wisest course. I have never been quite able to accustom myself to a young girl's going promiscuously into an office this way," he added, "but in this case it seems to be necessary."

"I shall be able to take care of myself, I think," she replied.

"I have no doubt you will; I have no doubt you will. The old house and grounds brought very little more than the mortgages," he said, looking about him. "It was a pity to sell them, but I know they could not remain as they are much longer. They are going to cut a street right through your lily pond some day."

Half an hour later the automobile drew up to the curb once again. Mr. Bruce rose. She walked

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down to the gate with him. The man in the machine looked at her attentively.

"Come here, Potter," called Bruce. "I want to present you to Miss York."

The man got down quickly and came in the gate. He was younger than Mr. Bruce, not yet turned thirty in fact, with alert eyes that never left the face of the person he was talking to. She was impressed with the extra care with which he was dressed.

"Potter," said the older man, "Miss York is about to study stenography. What do you consider the best way for her to go about it?"

Potter recommended a certain school. He directed a keen glance at her—a glance accustomed to quick appraisal.

"Take three months there. No more. And when you have finished," he said, "our firm will have a position ready for you, should you care to take it."

She flushed with pleasure and thanked him.

"That's a feather in your cap, Margaret," cried Mr. Bruce. "Potter is one of the foremost young business men in the city."

Potter clapped him lightly on the back and laughed. The two men got into the car, and as the

THE GARDEN—AUTUMN

machine started the young and foremost Mr. Potter turned and looked her squarely in the eyes just for a fraction of a second. There was no mistaking something in his eyes. The blood stirred within her. As Mr. Bruce had said, here was a feather in her cap.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW GARDEN

THE offices and factory of the Waring Company were built with an elaborate idea of forestalling Providence. The scheme of the whole plant was to make it so impervious to fire, water, lightning, sudden death, inefficiency, human error, lost motion, waste products, bad filing systems, and all the curses called down upon business undertakings by the aforesaid Providence that it should be a little universe all of its own—revolving, as it were, in its own orbit, making its own rules, and generally shaping that part of the imperfect world which came under its control in such a way that it would result in dollars for the Waring Company. Handling as they did large quantities of paints, volatile oils, and other inflammable liquids, the building was elaborately fire-proofed—equipped with steel doors that closed automatically in case of fire and automatic sprinklers that turned streams of water into the rooms where the temperature rose above

THE NEW GARDEN

a certain point. The hand of death was kept outside the property line of the Waring Company. All the dangerous machinery and the dangerous processes were safeguarded to protect man against his own carelessness. For the preparation of some of their more dangerous and volatile products they had a row of furnaces in the open air, each with its own chimney, where the men worked out-of-doors the year around. The danger from explosions was thus reduced to a minimum. They could not set back the sun as Joshua did, but they made every minute deliver to them sixty seconds' worth of value. The human heart rests between beats, but between the moment the whistle at Waring's blew to start and blew again to shut down there was no pause. The products moved steadily down from the top floor to the shipping room. The men worked with materials within easy reach, so that a man employed to use his hands was not compelled to use his legs. It was a big machine, of which the various cogs were human beings.

And one of those cogs was Margaret York. It would be futile to say that she did not resent being a cog, a mere unit whose usefulness to the whole ceased as soon as she ceased to follow certain

OUR MISS YORK

hard and set rules. Individuality was discouraged, suppressed, flattened out by a steam-roller which smoothed everything for the easy revolving of bigger wheels. When she was first taken into a large brick-walled room with a concrete floor and sat at a metal desk to which a messenger three times a day brought letters from N to R to be entered on a card index, and from morning to night did nothing but enter those letters on the card index, she knew that if they had attached a ball and chain to her ankle as well, she could not have been more discouraged and depressed.

But her training had not been of the sort that allowed much room for rebellious discontent. She recorded letters on her card index until she would wake up in the middle of the night repeating, "August 18th, William Sharpe. Requesting sample Number 196," or some such similar echo of the day's work. For six months she did that. It was a dreary, spiritless task. The other girls in the room plodded through their work thinking of other things, flying to whisper confidences to each other every stray minute that supervision was relaxed over them, endeavoring to make the minutes fly as fast as possible by taking their minds off their work whenever

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the chance offered. Margaret was not interested in them. She tried to be interested in the tiny facet of the big business that was offered to her view. She found that by working fast she could finish one collection of letters before the messenger brought her another. In the space of leisure she thus created for herself, she read the letters. It was not a strongly diverting occupation, for the communications, for the most part, were unintelligible to her. But when she began to get second and third letters on the same subject, sometimes a light would dawn—just a ray out of primeval darkness—but enough to stir her curiosity. After a certain time she found she had thoroughly well classified in her mind all the things about the factory that she did not know, which is the most unsatisfactory classification that can possibly exist in the human brain.

However, one day at the noon hour, the elevator boy, who ran his car up and down in a fire-proof chimney, offered to take her up to the roof so that she might eat her lunch there in the open air. After that she spent all her lunch periods on the roof. Most of the employees were anxious to get out on the street and see the outside world in their thirty minutes of leisure, but there were half a dozen others

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who, like herself, preferred the quiet of that place. These were all young boys—messengers, apprentices, embryo chemists. At first they were rather shy of her, but after a time the ice was broken and they would gather around her and gossip. She discovered that they made a point of knowing everything about the establishment—individual salaries, proposed changes, imminent discharges, and promotions, mistakes by superiors and all the current praise and slander. Interlarded with this, however, was a very fair understanding of what the firm manufactured and why and whereabouts in the building, how long it took, who were the experts, who were the drudges and a thousand and one such facts.

She found out that the firm manufactured now nothing but stains and varnishes for interior woodwork, making a specialty of finishes for chestnut and oak, which were susceptible to the action of ammonia. She also learned that on the top floor was a laboratory where a number of expensive chemists played with oils and pigments all day long, and every now and then furnished the firm with a new product. She learned that such and such a man getting four thousand dollars a year had dis-

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covered stain Number 1088, which had sold so well that the force had to be increased by nearly a third to manufacture it fast enough to supply the demand. She learned that before the advent of Mr. Potter as general manager, the Waring Company had manufactured almost every kind of paint and varnish and sold very little of it. The gossip that filtered down to those youths on the lowest rung was that the one word Mr. Potter had brought into the business was "Specialize." Where they had had before a hundred men making outside paint, inside paint, metallic paint, carriage paint, house varnish, spar varnish, water-proofing compounds, and a hundred other products, they had now nearly a thousand working on nothing but stains, and what they termed flat varnishes—which she learned was the name applied to varnishes without a gloss.

All this was technical and would have been deadly dull to her had she not been steeped for the past six months in the atmosphere of these terms, and had she not realized that with her entrance into that building all those terms and conditions became an inseparable part of her life.

The next step was that she must see the building. And at lunch hour every day with one or more of the

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boys as guide she visited little by little the whole working space of the plant. They were interested in her interest, and although they were bored immeasurably at times by the thoroughness with which she learned things, nevertheless her point of view on everything she saw was so naive that they never tired of the excursions. Men in the different departments, flattered by her interest, would explain things to her. Her circle of acquaintances grew. But she was naturally looked upon as an oddity by the other stenographers and women clerks, who could not understand her interest in the unpleasant smells upstairs.

One day as she was talking to one of the men in the room where the stain was stored in concrete tanks for the purpose of aging it, the man was suddenly frozen into silence. Across the room strode Mr. Potter, walking quickly, looking straight before him yet seeming to see everything. He asked a question of the man at a desk at the end of the room and then disappeared again. The next day in another room a similar thing happened, and, much to her surprise, on the third day, in a third room, he appeared again. On neither of these occasions had he spoken a word to her.

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"I think the boss disapproves of us nosing around," said one of her companions, in the vernacular. "I guess we had better cut it out."

"There is no reason why he shouldn't say so," the girl asserted.

In a moment Mr. Potter approached them, and, stopping as he was about to pass, said:

"Miss York, my stenographer has gone to lunch. Will you take dictation, please?"

He disappeared again. When she had recovered from her surprise, she inquired her way to his office and presented herself. She was conscious that her thrill of excitement was not altogether unmixed. Beside the very proper and businesslike enthusiasm she felt at being summoned to the office of her most important superior, she owned up to a certain feminine interest in the proceeding. A quite primitive emotion held her, for in spite of their relation as governor and governed, the fact remained that he was a man and she was a woman, and she was somewhat amused to find that her interest in him was more as a man than as a power. She found herself thinking that if he knew that thought he would have been highly indignant at the lese-majesty in it.

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He looked at her full in the eyes, smiled almost perceptibly, motioned her to a chair and began to dictate. He gave her three letters in all, which he announced briefly were to be rushed. She was dimly aware that there was a certain ritual concerning the number of carbon copies, the width of margin, the file number to be placed at the top of the sheet and the proper stationery to be used. But she had wit enough not to ask him concerning these things. Instead she closed her book and left the room with as much ease of manner as she could muster, as though she were merely carrying out one of the routine duties of her life. But the instant she had closed the door behind her, she picked out one of the girl stenographers with whom she had exchanged a few words on various occasions, and interrupting her in the midst of the sentence she was typing, told her she would give her the privilege of answering four questions—no more—on the subject of those letters. And when the girl, much amused, had complied, she tore back to her own desk and her fingers flew over the keys. In less than fifteen minutes the letters were in the hands of a messenger on the way to Mr. Potter's office. But all her elation was turned to gloom when presently

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one of the letters came back with a line through the word "subservient," into which she had managed to insert the letter "c." That evening as she went home she bought a pocket dictionary.

The routine of the office remained unchanged for her for a week or more after that, and then one day Mr. Potter sent for her.

"To-morrow," he said, "another girl will take your place in the file room. I shall need you here. I have a certain class of correspondence requiring discretion—can you be discreet?" he asked, suddenly.

She had been very demure and solemn up to this point.

"It's my middle name," she said, positively, dropping into the *argot* she heard about her all day long.

Potter leaned back in his chair and laughed. She was almost frightened at the sudden casting aside of his official manner.

"I think," said he, "we shall get along together. You will answer to this foot buzzer. If I ring three times it means, 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I need your ears.' You will then enter, seat yourself at the typewriter in the corner and write, but listen to what is being said. You are to be the Human Dictaphone."

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He dismissed her with a nod. She was never, however, called in to be the Human Dictaphone, except on one occasion when he was trying to find out why they had to pay so much more for turpentine than formerly. Most of her work was in taking dictation from him and keeping a file of orders promised in quick time.

There was such a demand for the Waring Company's products that the manufacture of them never quite kept pace with the orders, which had to be filled in rotation. But in some instances large orders were taken with the stipulation that they were to be delivered at a certain time. Mr. Potter took charge of all these. He dictated a letter saying that such and such things would be shipped on such and such a date. Margaret wrote the letter, making a carbon for the foreman of the factory, one for the shipping clerk, one for the bookkeeper and one for the general files. After she had been working on this kind of thing for some months she decided it would be well to have a fifth carbon to keep herself—for check. Mr. Potter had a remarkable facility for carrying a vast amount of detail in his head, and he would usually remember the date on which the shipment had been promised, and call up to find out if it had

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been sent. But sometimes, when there were a number of orders, he would forget. So on the proper date she would simply lay the order on his desk. But if this pleased him he said nothing whatever about it.

Now and then he would have an odd moment of relaxation, when he would set down his pack from his shoulders for an instant. On such occasions he took her breath away. In one of these moments just after he had put through a very big deal, he touched his buzzer three times. She entered in great haste and found him alone in the room.

"What am I to listen to?" she asked.

"Myself," he replied, with one of the grammatical aberrations that marked him for a self-made man.

She looked at him through eyes half-closed and began to laugh. She wore a narrow gold bracelet on her left forearm. To her surprise he reached forward and caught it in his thumb and forefinger.

"Sit down here."

She slipped her hand out of the bracelet.

"I think you may have it," she said, smiling.

He still held the gold trinket in his hand, looking a little sheepish. His jaws set. He laid it on the glass top of his mahogany desk.

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"I believe that will be all," he said, in his best office manner.

That evening some unexpected work came along which kept them both after office hours. When she had finished he called her into his office. He picked up the bracelet from the desk where it had been lying all afternoon.

"In receiving this bracelet again," he said, "I want you to feel that there goes with it my most earnest apology. An extraordinary enthusiasm seems to have seized me for the instant, which I assure you was not coupled with any disrespect for yourself."

She took the bracelet and slipped it on her arm.

"I realize that," she replied. "I have not thought much about it."

He looked at his watch and snapped it shut again.

"It is very late now," he said, "too late for your dinner. Could I prevail on you to dine with me?"

She felt that it would not be wise.

"I would prefer not. Not just yet. You see, we do not know each other very well."

"I feel as if I knew you quite well," he said. "Miss York," he broke off, shortly, "would you mind if I gave you a fatherly heart-to-heart talk?"

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"I should like it," she exclaimed, looking at him with interest.

"Then tell me this. Are you in this business world as a life-work, or is it just a life preserver to float you until you can get married?"

"Not by any means the latter," she replied, laughing.

"Then your heart is in the work."

"Oh, beyond a doubt."

"In that case," he said, "I shall give you a very strange piece of advice coming from an employer to an employee. And it is—don't stay with the Waring Company. You are an efficient person, and your grasp of the situation here has been marvelous. You will go far if you start right. But the right start is not here."

"Please explain," she said, flushing with pleasure.

"This factory is a finished product. There is no room here for any one to carve his name. The system is worked out—it is cut-and-dried—and all they need is a few animate objects to carry out the details. If you were a chemist and could discover new products, you might make a little headway. But the strategic points are held by stubborn people—like myself—and they have to be killed off before

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there is a chance for you or any one else. Ten years ago there was need in the company for new blood."

She looked at him curiously, knowing that that was the opportunity he had grasped.

"What chance is there for a woman in business?" she asked, presently.

"Just as much as for a man," he cried, emphatically. "There is no chance for those women in there who never under any circumstances let their minds be on their work. But what you need is opportunity. You have the ability."

"Thank you," she said.

"Now remember what I have told you," he concluded, "and when you have an opportunity to go to a place that *needs* you, *go*. That's what I did."

"I am sure I appreciate this," she said, rising, "and I shall try to be awake when the opportunity comes."

CHAPTER V

STANDSTILL STREET

MARGARET had been with the Waring Company a little more than a year when one morning Mr. Potter called her into his office. There was something very military about his office. The desk was a big mahogany one protected by a glass top, and upon it rested his writing materials, his telephones and two baskets for mail—nothing else. The decks were always cleared for action. He himself was attired in a dark suit pressed until it set upon him with absolute perfection. A band of white piping ran around the lapel of his vest—it was a noticeable thing that he considered it a part of his scheme of dress to wear a vest at all seasons of the year. His high button shoes were polished until they shone, and—this was a matter of very questionable taste, but it seemed somehow to carry out the perfect businesslike spruceness of him—his finger nails were manicured until they shone as well. Margaret had long ago decided that there

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was no personal vanity in this thoroughgoing orderliness. It was part of the military discipline of his business life.

He motioned her to a seat and swung around in his swivel chair until he faced her.

"Miss York," he said, "I want you to undertake a little mission for me this morning."

There was such an air of reserve force and of many interests about him, that his stopping for a moment in the course of his progress to pay personal attention to one always seemed somehow in the nature of a compliment. At any rate it usually set up in her a little tremor of excitement—wholly unwarranted, of course, but nevertheless pleasant.

"A customer of ours," Potter continued, "has just telephoned to me to say that he did not receive a certain shipment which our records show was delivered last week. Now there is no doubt about this. Our wagon made delivery and we have his receipt. But the point is, he says he has not the goods. And as he remarks, with some justice, you can't mislay a hundred gallons of paint."

A messenger brought in a telegram which he read and put his initials upon.

"This sort of thing," he continued, "is coming up

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all the time. Of course, we could simply say we have made delivery and wash our hands of the matter. But I believe in leaving people satisfied. The peace of mind of our customers is worth half a million dollars a year to us. As Julius Cæsar says, let's have fellows around us that sleep at nights."

The telephone buzzer on his desk sounded. With the perfect poise that only a mind which deals with one subject at a time can achieve, he went on talking as if he had heard no sound.

"I want you to go down to this man's place and *find that shipment*. It is a matter that requires a little tact, so—you will know what to do. The man runs a notoriously careless business, and you are liable to find the stuff anywhere. The name of the party is Cyrus Bundy. And," he concluded, "don't return without finding the goods."

"I promise," she said.

She got the address from the outer office, and half an hour later found herself on a dingy street near the wharves, crowded with drays and motor trucks. This was Severn Street. She was searching for Number 56 as she walked along. The whole vicinity teemed with a seedy, out-at-the-elbows prosperity, as though the people behind all those

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dismal façades had fortified themselves against business and it had broken in in spite of them. The entrances to their shops were so piled about with merchandise that a hopeful customer had to burrow his way in like a mole, and within all was so dark that he groped blindly about in the semi-twilight, not knowing at what instant his career might be cut short by his stumbling over an iron anchor or striking his head against a bundle of pulleys. It was contrary to all the rules of Severn Street to paint, clean, scrub, garnish, repair, or resort to any such vanities of the flesh. It was unprofessional to call attention to one's position in the hazy fog of buildings by legible signs or by new paint. It was bad taste to display zeal, enterprise or a new idea,—a new idea especially. Severn Street's zenith of progress had been reached in eighteen eighty-one and had crystallized there. Sometimes people called it Standstill Street.

Amid the dust and cobwebs that obscured the transom of one of these typically musty edifices appeared like a steamboat in a fog the dim outlines of Number 56. The building lived up to all the traditions of the street—in fact, it went beyond them. The dingy smoke gray of its flat front

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represented the white paint of years past. The rusted iron grilles, the unwashed windows, the cracked lintels, the stone steps out of line and worn concave, bore testimony to the principle of letting the cash seek the man. Here also was the conservative pride in having a reputation of such long standing that no legend was necessary to inform the public of the location of the establishment. The wooden sign that hung below the second story windows read "'rus Bundy and Son," the syncopation of the first syllable, due to a part of the sign having blown away, never having been remedied. Had the whole sign blown away it would have been considered an unnecessary vanity to have procured another.

Margaret entered through the narrow doorway. The interior did nothing to lower the standard of dinginess set up by the outside. It was lighted by the little daylight the begrimed windows allowed to filter through and by two white globed gas burners. A wooden counter divided the public space from the area where two clerks conducted their activities. There was no pomp and ceremony about the place. She asked for Mr. Bundy, and was directed by a gesture toward the open door on her left.

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The door opened into a room about fifteen feet square. Across one end of it was a long table piled haphazard with letters, newspapers, cigar butts, catalogues, samples of material and a few stray hats and coats. Against the opposite wall stood a high book-keeper's desk of the kind prevalent in the days of Uriah Heep, its top adorned with a tiny balustrade to keep one's pen from rolling off on the floor, and its sloping bosom covered with an ancient and germ-bearing piece of felt, once green, now dust-colored. An overgrown wooden stool stood before this relic, its rungs loose and slipping out, so that it gave the impression of being just about to lie down on all-fours. Upon this dangerous piece of furniture a carpet saddle was tacked, showing that some one had confidence in its integrity.

The office filing system was visible. Upon a wooden shelf in the corner stood what appeared to be an edition of some old encyclopædia, but what was really, to the initiated, merely a series of boxes shaped like books, so arranged that when one received a business letter that for some reason he wished to keep, he could put it in one of these and have it the next time he wanted it, provided he could remember which box he put it in.

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There were two men in this room when Margaret entered, and, as neither of them paid any attention at all to her, she removed a paper parcel from the chair by the table and sat down.

She looked curiously at the men. One of them was a thin stoop-shouldered person with a worried black mustache, and soft, brown eyes that also seemed to be continually worried about something. The frown between his eyebrows formed a capital "W" which might possibly have stood for "worry" too. He had the air of a quiet unoffending animal that felt it was being unnecessarily harassed by something or other. She looked for some mark of identification upon him, and saw in a moment as he stood near her that there was a letter "B" on his cuff links.

The other man was a well-dressed, middle-aged person who was in a very bad humor. It was apparent from the conversation that some materials he had ordered had not been delivered. His ill-humor was further heightened by the fact that he seemed to have sent a check to pay for the order in question.

"I can't tell about it right now," observed the man she surmised to be Bundy, at last; "the order isn't on the books, and I'm sure if I had received

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your letter I would have filed it under 'Orders,' or 'Paints and Oils.' You saw it wasn't there."

"You might have filed it under 'Upkeep,'" suggested the visitor, sarcastically, glancing at the volumes of the pseudo-encyclopædia.

The other shook his head seriously.

"No, I couldn't have done that. Of course," the other returned seriously, "we have no record of the check. We just gather all the checks together every day and send them to the bank and charge the whole amount to receipts."

"That's no way to do business," snapped the visitor.

The other passed his hand over his hair.

"That's the way we have always done it," he returned. "My father did it fifty years ago."

"All right, Mr. Bundy," the man said, "and your son may do it fifty years hence, but it won't be my checks." He picked up his hat and coat.

"We will find your order in a day or so. I will start them looking now for it," explained Bundy, patiently.

"And when you fill it," retorted the other as he went out, "you may do so with the satisfaction of knowing it will be the last one you will get."

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Bundy fumbled with the papers on his desk.

"All right," he muttered, as the man passed out of ear-shot. "Go and take your confounded business with you."

He absently put a paper clasp on a sheaf of papers and then took it off again. Then he suddenly seemed to become aware of her.

"Is there something I can do for you?" he asked.

"I am from the Waring Company," she began.

"More trouble," he said. "Do you know, we never got that paint?"

"We have your receipt for it."

"That must be a mistake. We haven't the stuff, and it couldn't have vanished into thin air. Wait a moment until I call the foreman of my stock-room."

He went to the door. "Benjamin," he said, "call Scaggs down here."

He returned and went to the desk where there was a small pasteboard box with holes in it. He took off the lid and looked at the contents with much interest. He turned suddenly to Margaret.

"Ever see anything like that?" he asked.

She looked into the box. In it was a green and white bug about the size of the end of her thumb

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which had a pair of horns at its head and another at its tail. It had a number of yellow spots on it.

"Those little spots," he said, "are parasites that have been boarding inside him. They very carefully eat away all his muscular structure, making sure not to injure his vital organs, in order that he may live as long as possible. And when he can't stand the strain any more and dies, they leave him and lay their eggs inside another similar organism."

"That's interesting," said Margaret. "Did you find him here?"

"No, I brought him down so I could watch him and note what happened."

A man entered the room. He was a gaunt, big-boned individual of about fifty-five or sixty. He wore a vest and no coat. He had bright piercing eyes and very short lips, which allowed his teeth to show. This, together with a bristling short beard and mustache, gave him an appearance like a squirrel.

"Scaggs," said Mr. Bundy, "were you here on the day that Warings said they delivered that stain?"

"I don't know what day they said they delivered it."

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"On the twelfth."

"I don't see what difference it makes, but I wasn't here on the twelfth."

"Couldn't it have been received in your absence?"

"It would be there if it had been received, wouldn't it?" demanded the squirrel.

"Yes, I suppose it would. But Warings say they have a receipt for it."

"Oh, yes," returned the other with an air of immense sophistication, "these people always have receipts. On the day of judgment they'll have passes through the Pearly Gates too."

Margaret did not attempt to reply to this, but made the suggestion that they all three take a look among the stock.

"That's just a waste of time, Mr. Bundy," objected Scaggs.

"Well, we'll do it anyway," returned Bundy.

They walked down a narrow hallway and up a stairway with round newel post and flat hand-rail like those prevalent in private houses fifty years ago, the squirrel grumbling all the while. The second floor was a big storeroom. At one end were shelves on which were placed side by side

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paints, oils, stains and varnishes, with no apparent system. They scanned all these shelves.

"How do you know where to look for things?" Margaret asked.

"I keep it all in my head," Scaggs replied, proudly.

"It simply ties us up when he is away, too," observed Bundy. "How do you keep your stock-room?" he demanded of Margaret.

She explained something about their system, which was run like a bank, so that the amount of any given material furnished to the various departments of the Company, subtracted from the amount of that material purchased by the Company, always equaled the amount of the material in the stock-room.

"Don't see how you do it. We have stock in this room that we don't know we have."

"I wouldn't say that, sir," broke in Scaggs. "There isn't a pound of material in this building that I don't know of."

"Well, that may be," observed Bundy. "But just for instance, what's in that wire bound box there at the bottom of the pile?"

Scaggs gazed at it blankly.

"I can't tell you offhand," he replied, stoutly,

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"but I could tell as soon as I got it out from under the pile."

"That's what I mean," said Bundy, while the foreman, very red in the face, trudged after them.

"I am sure it is not down here," said Margaret. "Let's go up-stairs."

"But we never put paints there," protested Scaggs.

"That is a good clew," she observed. "You probably haven't looked there."

They went up the steep wooden steps, Margaret rather cautiously, for the steps had no hand-rail, and the square hole that admitted them to the floor above was commanded by a huge trap-door standing menacing and almost perpendicular at the edge of it, as if ready to close at any instant. The third floor was entirely filled with hardware. It was very dark, and she had difficulty in seeing, but she knew she would recognize the Waring Company's box by the metal reinforcements at the corners. However, she saw no such box.

"What did I tell you?" cried the foreman, triumphantly. "Don't talk about receipts to me."

Margaret felt somewhat despondent about her errand, especially as she had told Mr. Potter that

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she would not return without finding the goods. There could be no doubt that they had been delivered. And yet they did not seem to be there. There was no cellar to the building. The first floor was devoted entirely to offices. And she had explored the second and third so carefully that she was convinced that the shipment was not there. She was just about to go down the steep wooden stairs again when her eye fell once more upon the trap-door.

It was about five feet high and opened up against the sloping roof at the rear of the building.

"What is behind that?" she demanded, grasping at a straw.

"That door," said the foreman, impressively, "has never been moved in twenty years. Nothing *could* get back of that."

There was no way to look back of it. She put her finger on its top edge.

"Very little dust," she said, "for twenty years."

Bundy snapped his fingers suddenly.

"Why," he exclaimed, "confound it, if I didn't have them put that door down myself the day they spilled banana oil. The odor almost drove us crazy down-stairs."

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Margaret smiled. "Let's put it down again."

Scaggs grumbled, but found an iron bar and with it unloosed the hook that held the door upright. He and Bundy gradually lowered the heavy square of lumber until it was flush with the floor. Behind it in the shadow stood a wooden box reinforced at the corners. It was marked :

*"From the Waring Company.
Packed September 12th."*

CHAPTER VI

RUSTED COGS

“**Y**OU did not tell me your name,” Bundy said, as she was about to go.

“Margaret York.”

“Well, Miss York, I—will you step into my office for a moment?”

She followed him into his topsy-turvy sanctum.

“I want to talk to you about my office,” he began. “There isn’t any system here. Everything is at sixes and sevens. It seems to me that business is getting more and more complicated every year, and somehow or other we aren’t able to keep up with it.”

He passed his hand over his hair in a harassed way.

“What I need here is a thorough overhauling of things. You saw the stock-room—old Adam Scaggs has got it so tangled up that nobody can make head nor tail of it, and he is so pig-headed

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you couldn't move him with a dynamite bomb. Then my files here—I don't seem to be able to keep things straight. I work from early morning until late at night, and the work piles up until I nearly lose my mind."

He rose and paced up and down the room, his hands clasped behind his back.

"I have a good business. We deal in paints, glass and hardware, and supply the stores of all the towns along the river from here down to the bay. The storekeepers used to come up on the boat one day and we would fill their orders, take their money and send the material down on the boat the next day. But now they've got to telephoning their orders, and asking for thirty days' credit, and two per cent. off for cash and all that sort of thing. And they've got to splitting up their bills and paying with notes running thirty, sixty and ninety days. Why, our bookkeeping is a regular snarl. And where we used to keep one brand of white paint, one thickness of glass, and one kind of sash-lock, now we have to keep several in order to satisfy our customers. The business has got so complicated that we can't keep up with it. Something has to be done. I'm losing trade right along."

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He stopped before the shelf in the corner and regarded it mournfully.

"Now there are my files—what ought I to do about them?" he demanded.

"Those aren't files," she asserted laughing. "They are simply hiding places."

"How do Warings file their letters?" he demanded.

"What record do you keep of your outgoing letters?" she asked, by way of reply.

"We press-copy them in those books."

"Letters on all subjects in the same book?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it rather difficult to find a letter?"

He stroked his chin and the frown deepened.

"It's—it's maddening," he said. "Those tissue paper sheets stick together until they drive you crazy."

"What you need," she told him, "is a vertical filing system arranged alphabetically by names of your correspondents. You have a series of folders in which your letters lie flat as if they were in a book, and in each folder is all the correspondence with one particular person, both outgoing and incoming. It is very entertaining. It gives you

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the whole history of any particular case in an instant."

"That's what I want," he asserted, earnestly.
"That's the sort of thing I want."

He fumbled nervously with some papers on his desk.

"What would—how can I get a person who knows about these things? I need some one."

"It's very easy," she said, smiling.

"How?"

"Just ask her."

"But the trouble is—now *you're* just the kind of person I want."

"That's what I've been thinking."

He turned on her in surprise.

"Would you come?"

She looked at him thoughtfully. She remembered Mr. Potter's advice to leave the Waring Company as soon as she could and take a place with a firm that needed her services. This looked like such a firm. The chance that existed for bringing order out of chaos was very alluring.

"Why, yes," she responded, "I would come—if everything could be arranged satisfactorily."

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"I think we can make a financial arrangement to suit you," he said.

"Then," she replied, "I see no obstacle."

She returned to her office and in half an hour or so, when Mr. Potter was disengaged, she entered his room.

"Did you find it?" he asked.

"Of course. You wouldn't have let me in the office if I hadn't."

"Where did you locate it?" he continued, smiling.

She told him the story of her visit.

"Poor old Bundy. He has an awful time," he commented.

"Mr. Potter, tell me this," she said; "has he a very good business?"

"Excellent," he responded, immediately. "All those down-river storekeepers swear by Bundy and Son. But I don't think he makes much money. He needs the voltage raised. There isn't a strong enough current running through the place now."

"Do you think more system and order and so forth would accomplish that?"

"Undoubtedly. System is the foundation of mercantile self-respect. When you have that you are beginning to hit your stride. A business is like an

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army. It never begins to accomplish things until it moves like a machine."

"I am glad to hear you say that," she replied, "because I have decided to try to systematize Bundy and Son."

"I thought you would," he said.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLAY CALLED JULIUS CÆSAR

ABOUT three months later an automobile stopped before Number 56 Severn Street. A well-groomed man in a fur coat alighted and entered the outer office of Bundy and Son. He nodded curtly to the clerk at the counter and passed on to Mr. Bundy's office. There he stood for a moment aghast. All of the old furniture and junk that had been in that room since time was had disappeared. In its place in the centre of the room was a wide flat-topped desk with swivel chairs on either side of it. There was no litter of papers on this desk. A rug covered the floor. Several units of a vertical filing case stood in one corner. In the other was a table with a typewriter on it. At the desk, with her back to the door, Margaret York was sitting.

The man entered quietly.

"Is Mr. Bundy in?" he asked, in a moment.

She turned around, and her face broke into a smile.

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"Why no, Mr. Potter, he is not. But I am his secretary. Perhaps you could transact your business with me."

"No business to transact," he replied, laughing. "I'm just looking about without intending to purchase."

"Well, what do you think of us?" she asked, eagerly.

"Great!" he replied. "How did you do it? How did you get rid of the old heirlooms?"

"The roll-top desk that sat over there against the wall went first. I said, 'Mr. Bundy, this isn't a desk, it's a cemetery.' We cleaned it out and discovered twenty letters he had been looking for for months. We exiled that desk and got this one in its place. When we got the filing cases and the rest of the things there wasn't room for the old stuff, so we cleaned house. Looks luxurious now, doesn't it?"

She rose.

"We have a little private room in here I wish you to see," she said, opening a door at the end of the office. "Place for conferences. Also, we have all our samples and catalogues on these shelves. I have a card index to them here," she said, touching a drawer beside her.

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"What's that second card index drawer for?" he asked.

"That," she said, her eyes sparkling, "is my record of stock."

"*You* keep the record of stock?"

"Yes. I sign all receipts for everything delivered to us, and nothing leaves without an order from Mr. Bundy."

"Jupiter! Did you poison that Scaggs party?"

"I hypnotized him. For about a month I conversed with him at my leisure, inserting the idea into his head piece by piece, and then one day he suggested it to me. He feels it is his own scheme."

"You can tell down to the last gill then just how much of everything you have?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Let me see; how much turpentine have you?"

She took out a card and told him.

"You had better get more," he said quietly. "It is going up again."

She turned the card upside down in the drawer so that a little projecting piece stood up above the other cards.

"That means order more," she explained.

"I don't know what we are going to do if the

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price of turpentine keeps rising," he went on. "I think we shall have to go into some other business."

They returned to the other room.

"You have done well," he said, taking up his hat.

"Thank you. Aren't you sorry," she said, mischievously, "you let so valuable a person go?"

"I? I haven't by any means let you go."

She raised her eyebrows. But just at that moment Mr. Bundy came in.

An hour or so later Bundy looked up from the letters before him.

"Miss York," he asked, "how influential a person is Potter at Warings? Is his word law?"

"Yes. He is the commander-in-chief."

"He's a cold man, isn't he?"

"More or less."

"I thought so. I heard a story of a man up there who discovered this Number 1088 stain for them, on which they have made at least half a million dollars this last year; and they haven't raised his salary a penny."

"I know that is true," she admitted. "The man's name is Evans. He has threatened many times to leave them."

"That sounds like a very cheap thing to do."

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"It's hard to tell about those things," she replied. Just then the telephone bell rang. She reached for the instrument.

"Is Miss York there?" said a voice.

"Yes, Mr. Potter," she said, quickly.

She looked up at Bundy with an amused expression.

"Speaking of angels," he observed. But he did not guess the feeling of pleasant excitement that seized her.

"You are very accurate at guessing people," said the voice over the wire.

"A man can keep few secrets from a woman who has been his stenographer."

"Will you go to the theatre with me to-night?"

"No," she replied, pleasantly, drawing lines on the blotter with her finger nail.

"I admire your decisive manner. Why?"

"Well, you're just a—business acquaintance."

"How can I remedy that?"

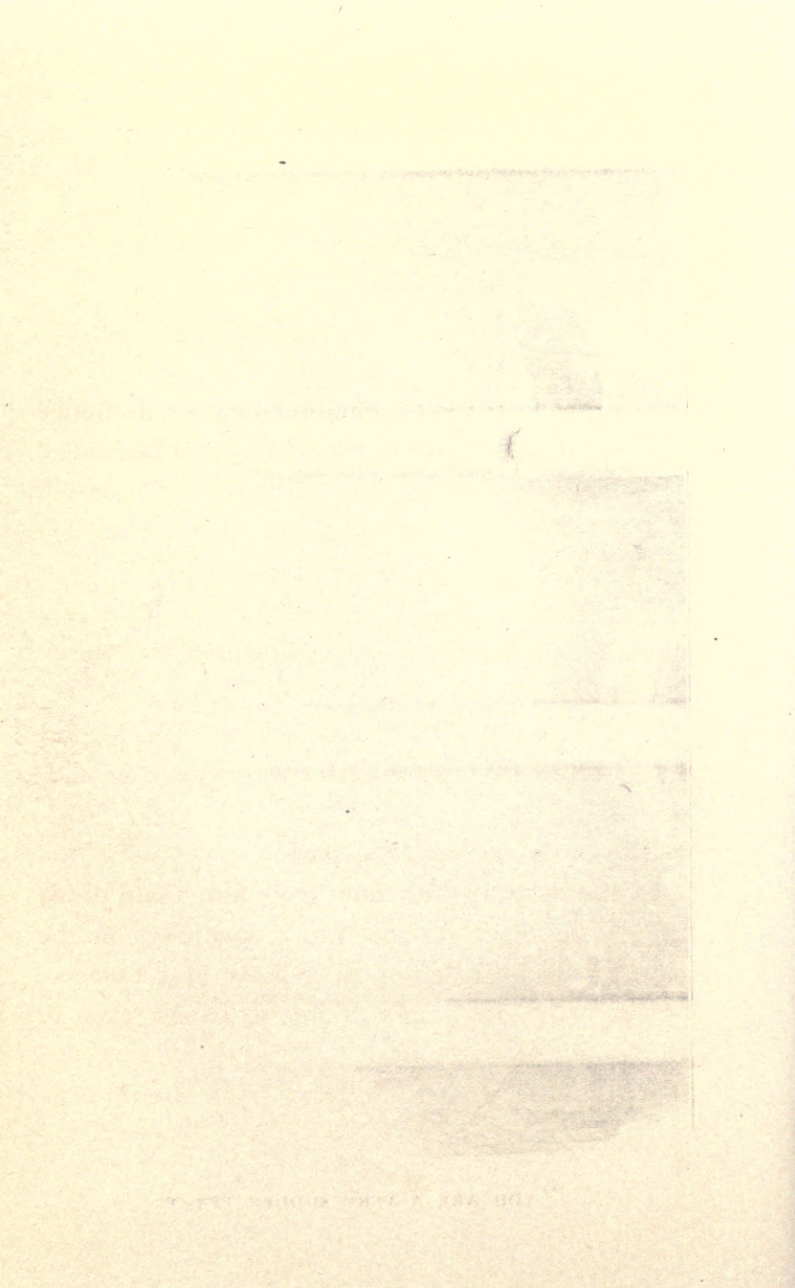
"Is it necessary?" she asked, with mischief in her eye.

"Absolutely."

"Then you might call on me some time, I suppose."



“YOU ARE A VERY SUDDEN PERSON”



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"Will that fix it?"

"Try it."

"Very good. Good-bye."

She hung up the receiver.

"You don't mind how you talk to them, do you?" observed Bundy.

At four o'clock that afternoon the same automobile rolled up to Number 56 Severn Street that had rolled up there earlier in the day. The same fur-coated gentleman alighted and entered the outer office. He met Margaret coming out with her hat on.

"Miss York, I am on the point of calling upon you this afternoon so that I may take you to the theatre this evening."

She stopped short. "You are a very sudden person. You take my breath away with your suddenness."

"The car is out here," he said.

She drove away with him, gave him a cup of tea—which he disliked, but drank manfully—in the parlor of her boarding-house and sent him home so she could have her dinner in time to dress to go with him again in the evening.

"By the way, what is the play?" she asked, as he was going.

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"Julius Cæsar."

"Oh, yes. Comic opera," she said, smiling.

She was surprised to have him deny it earnestly.

"It's Shakespeare," he assured her. "It's the only one of his I ever saw, but I always see it every time they play it here. It's a great piece of work."

At the theatre she was astonished to find him actually tremendously excited over the play. She was used to the judicial calm with which people usually sit through Shakespeare, and his enthusiasm was refreshing.

"It's a shame that this Mark Antony," he told her, "couldn't have been in some big business. If he had been living to-day he would have owned every railroad in the United States. Every time I hear that funeral speech of his I think if I could just string together words like that, there wouldn't be any way of stopping me. I'd be a multi-millionaire in a month. He starts out talking with the crowd cold and favoring the other side, and when he finishes they can't do enough for him. If he had been selling something instead of making an oration, he would have taken more orders than he could have filled in the following ten years."

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"Do you always measure up things by business standards?" she asked.

"I have to," he said simply. "I haven't enough of that thing they call culture to be able to judge things accurately from any other standpoint. But with business standards I am on firm ground."

She thought a moment. Something Bundy had said was in her mind.

"Speaking of business standards," she said, suddenly, "would you say that charity had any place in business?"

"No."

She looked at him in surprise.

"I believe," he said, "that in his personal life a man should be charitable. But charity in business is simply favoritism. You should play the game strictly according to the rules yourself, and you should make everybody earn every penny he gets. Then you get efficiency for yourself and self-reliance for every one else."

"I have wondered," she said, with a note of simple curiosity in her voice, "why Evans was never raised. What was the theory of that?"

"I am glad you asked me," he replied. "We offered Evans, when we employed him, the choice of

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four thousand a year flat, or two thousand a year with a royalty from everything he discovered. He took the big salary. That was his error."

"And your company profited by his error?"

"I seem to feel a certain criticism in your tone," he said, meeting her eyes.

"No," she replied, frankly, "I am trying to understand."

"Then you must remember that business cuts the line of justice square in the middle. It is just as unfair to give a man a dollar he hasn't earned as it is to deprive him of one that rightfully belongs to him. In the case of Evans, we had confidence in him and he did not have confidence in himself. Therefore we earned the money and he did not."

"I can see that is quite just," she replied, "painfully just."

"Of course. One side of justice is always painful. But to go a little further into the question," he continued, "if we were to allow sentimental reasons to make us lenient in taking money that rightfully belonged to us; then when a period of bad business came—and no firm is exempt from such a thing—when every penny was needed, it might be that that former leniency would be just the factor that would

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prevent us from riding out the storm. In which case numerous innocent creditors would lose money. That wouldn't be justice."

"Furthermore," he observed, "no case is as simple as it at first appears. Think of this phase. If we explain to Evans that we consider that such and such a product would sell well and he perfects that product, whose insight has been the keenest—his or ours?"

"I think I begin to see," she said. She was just a little ashamed of having allowed a suspicion of injustice on his part to take root in her mind.

"Tell me," she said, lest he might read from her silence the thought that had been in her head, "do you ever fear a big business reverse for the Waring Company?"

"Frequently," he said, smiling. "The price of turpentine 'doth bestride us like a Colossus,' as one of the fellows in the play said. It is costing us more and more every day to manufacture our products. The parties who use linseed oil where we use turpentine have a tremendous advantage over us. For they can use an imitation linseed oil. It isn't as good, by any means, but it is cheaper, and they are crowding us out."

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“Are you alarmed?”

“That is just a spectre in the distance,” he replied, smiling contentedly. “We are still very much alive.”

She parted from him with a feeling of having seen a little beyond the outer wall of his spirit. When she had made a light in her room, she found a letter on her dressing table from Mr. Bruce. It was a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, which was the proceeds of the sale of a little piece of property Mr. Lacey had had an interest in, which had been for many months in litigation. It was a very welcome addition to her little surplus, which she was hoarding carefully. Mr. Bruce's letter explained the circumstances of the transaction and congratulated her on having received any money at all from it.

“You will be interested to know,” he went on, “that David had a picture in the Salon which caused much favorable comment. It was a painting of the interior of the Sainte Chapelle, remarkable, I understand, for the wonderful quality of the light through the stained glass. He had spent months in the study of the old stained glass in order that he might understand his subject, and get just the right quality. But I fear it has not been an altogether

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profitable venture. For he has become so interested in the old glass that he has not painted a stroke for many months. He is now at Chartres preparing a monograph on the windows of the cathedral. I sometimes regret that David has a little income of his own. He does not seem able to *find himself*."

Margaret folded up the letter.

"Poor David," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THING TO DO WITH A KEY

MR. BUNDY was worried. The harassed and hunted look was more than usually in evidence. He passed his hand over the hair at the back of his head a great many times. He appeared not to be devoting his attention to the work before him. This was unusual. He was accustomed to struggle hard with his tasks. He would view a question from every possible and every impossible angle. He plunged into a subject like a boat in a fog, feeling his way along and wondering what was beyond. He would sit for a long while staring at a letter, letting its message seep into his brain, and waiting for decision to spring forth. But decision only sprang forth after a deadly hand-to-hand conflict with his soul,—and even then it left behind sickening doubt as to its correctness. But to-day there was none of this grueling concentration. His attention wandered.

“Well,” Margaret demanded, presently, looking up, “what is it?”

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"What's what?" he asked, dully.

"You're stewing over something. What is on your mind?"

He pushed his papers aside as if they annoyed him.

"I'm worried sick over this business," he said, irritably. "I need five hundred dollars to carry me through the month, and I can't collect a penny for thirty days. Isn't that enough to worry about?"

"You have too much of your money tied up," she asserted.

"I know that," he replied, despondently. "I have five thousand dollars' worth of material upstairs in this building. 'Water, water everywhere,'" he added, "'and not a drop to drink.'"

"That's it exactly," she went on. "Mr. Pot—what I mean to say is, I have been told that the best rule of business is to keep turning over the stock. No material should stay in your wareroom more than four months, so that the same capital will earn a profit for you three times a year."

He fidgeted in his chair.

"I know," he said impatiently, "that's all right for theory. But if you can't sell a thing you can't sell it, and that settles it."

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"Let me tell you something," she said; "you have up-stairs five or six hundred dollars' worth of an expensive white enamel paint that you've never sold a gallon of."

"I know that."

She rose and opened the drawer of her card index.

"You have a hundred gallons of it, and you paid five dollars and a quarter a gallon for it. It is supposed to retail at eight dollars a gallon. That is real money lying there."

"That's just what drives me to distraction," he said, wearily. "And there is no demand for that article among our customers. That investment was a dead loss."

"If you had that money it would tide you over until your accounts began to come in."

"If I had it."

She turned to him eagerly.

"Will you give me permission to get that money back if I can?"

"What's your scheme?" he asked, with interest.

"Will you give me permission?"

"Certainly I'll give you permission. But I don't think you'll need the permission."

"Wait and see."

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He smoothed the back of his head doubtfully. As he was leaving at the close of the day, he stopped by her desk.

"I am going down the river to-morrow," he said, jocularly. "When I come back please have that money for me. Put it right under the paper-weight there."

"Very well," she replied.

On fine mornings she made it a point to walk to the office. It brought color to her cheeks, and cleared her mind. The following day was crisp and cold, and the sun was pleasantly warm. Accepting the invitation of these two extremes, she finished her breakfast somewhat ahead of schedule and gave herself wholly over to adventure by following a hitherto untried route on her walk.

No adventure of very great moment occurred, however. But possessed by a spirit of curiosity she made one pause in her progress. Her journey led her along a street on which were being erected several rows of regular city houses. With a half-formed idea in her head, she favored one of the houses with a tour of inspection.

A gentleman, who was hovering about with a spider-like intentness, issued forth and seized her in

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his figurative tentacles. But she was not alarmed. In fact, she gave him a certain amount of attention. And as she listened to his talk, she looked about her. She was amused to note that while none too much care had been lavished on the timbers and laths, and, in general, the bones of the structures, yet they were to have all such luxuries as parquet flooring, mirrors in bedroom doors, lights in closets that burned when you opened the door, and as many such showy accoutrements as possible to charm the eye and open the purse of the prospective buyer. The idea shaped itself in her mind. She asked the man the name of the builder of the houses.

"You mean the agent?" he asked, eagerly. "I am the agent."

"No, I mean the builder."

He seemed disappointed, but told her the builder's name was Callahan. She thanked him and departed. When she arrived at her office, she looked up the name of Callahan in the telephone book and called up his office.

"Is Mr. Callahan there?"

"Who wants him?"

"Bundy and Son," she replied, confidently. She had discovered that every one knew of Bundy and

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Son, and the name was an open sesame. Mr. Callahan presently answered.

"Mr. Callahan," she said, "do you intend to use any white interior paint on those houses at Fairfax Street?"

"Yes."

"Why not use an enamel paint?"

"Too expensive," said Mr. Callahan, laconically.

"Wouldn't it help sell the houses, supposing you could get it cheap?"

"Yes." A pause. "How cheap?"

"We have a hundred gallons," she said, "of Albatross Special, we will sell for five dollars and a quarter a gallon, if we can sell it to-day."

"Albatross Special, did you say?"

"Yes."

She waited anxiously. She could actually feel her heart beating.

"I'll take it," said the voice at her ear, in a moment.

"Thank you. And the money?"

"Let you have it this afternoon."

She banged down the receiver excitedly. She called for the office boy, who came precipitously.

"Benjamin," she exclaimed, pointing to the paper-

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weight on Mr. Bundy's side of the desk, "don't you move that paper-weight all day long on pain of instant dismissal. I have something I want to put under it to-night."

The boy gazed at her open-mouthed.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"And while you have your mouth open, call Mr. Scaggs for me, please."

She was in an overwhelmingly good humor. In marked contrast to her entered presently Scaggs, glum and dyspeptic. His spirit had been further depressed by the fact that Benjamin had just stolen up behind him and shouted his name in such a loud tone that he had jumped and torn his trousers on a nail. Altogether he was in a very low frame of mind.

"Mr. Scaggs," said Margaret, "will you get down that hundred gallons of Albatross Special—you know what I mean—and send it to this address?"

Scaggs' face was a mask of stone.

"Mr. Bundy left no orders for me to send that out," he asserted, stolidly.

"I give you the order now."

"I take my orders from Mr. Bundy."

"Continue to take them from Mr. Bundy," she

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retorted, pleasantly. "I will get one of the clerks to do it."

He blocked her way. "No one is going to touch a thing in my stock-room without orders from Mr. Bundy," he asserted tenaciously.

"Mr. Bundy is away. I am in charge," she said quietly.

"He did not tell me so."

She began to lose patience.

"In addition to that," he asserted, "the delivery wagons are all down at the wharves."

"I can remedy that."

She stepped to the telephone, and, calling a local transfer company, directed them to send a large wagon immediately.

"Now, there's no use doing that," cried Scaggs, angrily. "No one is going to touch that stock without doing physical violence to me."

She was at a loss to know what to do. No amount of explanation could convince the old man. It was plain to be seen that he felt this was just an effort to put him in a subordinate position, and he was prepared to show that it could not be done.

"Where is Mr. Bundy to-day?" he exclaimed, belligerently. "I am going to find out if my work

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is to be interfered with in this way. I have been in this office, man and boy, more than forty years, and I do not intend to knuckle under to any one. I want to know where Mr. Bundy is."

Mr. Bundy being on a river-boat at that instant it was impossible to communicate with him. Margaret did not answer. She was trying to think of a way to gain her point. Scaggs rapped on the desk with his knuckles.

"Miss York, I say where is Mr. Bundy?"

Leisurely she turned her head and looked at him.

"Call that number," she said, writing down a telephone number at random.

She put the telephone instrument on the slide of her desk and he sat down to it with his back to the door. She rose and taking some catalogues that were on the desk put them in place in the little private office. When she returned, the old man, not at all used to telephone service, was struggling to get the number. She passed behind him and went to the door. She stood at the threshold for a moment with a strange smile on her lips. Then very softly she closed the door and locked it.

The little force in the outer office watched this proceeding with interest. At that time there hap-

THE THING TO DO WITH A KEY

pened to be no customers at the counter. She turned to the two young men behind it.

"I wish you would come up-stairs and help me," she said, quietly. "Benjamin can take charge of the office."

They nodded and followed her toward the rear hall.

She hesitated a moment, looking at the boy with a curious light in her eyes.

"Take good care of the office, Benjamin," was all she said, however.

The boy heard their footsteps echo along the hall and up the old creaking stairs. And then all was quiet. He gazed curiously at the closed door to Mr. Bundy's office, leaning ungracefully over the counter on his stomach to obtain a view of it. No explanation of this phenomenon occurring to him, however, he retired to his own particular corner of the room, tilted his own particular chair up against the wall at his own particular angle and gazed comfortably into space, considering absently the design and construction of the black metal chandelier that grew out of the ceiling, and wondering why it was necessary for it to be fat in one place and thin in another.

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From the next room Scaggs' voice made itself heard now in violent altercation with some one over the telephone. Benjamin made a mental note that the stock-room foreman was angry, and smiled benignantly. Never is irritation in others more pleasant than when one is young.

The voice at the telephone ceased and there was a sound of footsteps approaching the door. Benjamin and the chair came down with alacrity upon their six collective legs, and the former gazed about for some plausible means of employment. Nothing more feasible occurring to him he slid into a chair before the typewriter and began to write, "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog." He heard the knob of the door rattle. Demure as a girl—the very picture of industry—his fingers rattled over the keys. For once Scaggs would be able to find no room for fault. He shot back the carriage and began, "The quick brown ——"

And then there burst out in that quiet and peace-blessed place a multisonous roar, as though sixty times the six hundred troopers of Balaklava had thundered through and were charging without stopping to reason why into the very midst of Mr. Bundy's private office. Or so it seemed to the

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astounded picture of innocence in the outer office, who sprang breathless into the middle of the floor whence all but him had fled and gazed aghast at the quivering panels of the door. What did it all mean? He took a step forward and stopped uncertainly. The voice of Scaggs burst forth in sonorous and fulminating eloquence, blazing with brimstone and the names of the saints.

The strategic delicacy of Benjamin's position was only too apparent to him. If he stood close by with the air of being ready to lend a willing hand at the proper moment, when Scaggs broke down the door (as he would in course of time, together with the rest of the building) it was quite apparent that the first object open for blame and chastisement would be little Benjamin. On the other hand, if he simply sat serenely at his typewriter and tried to pretend that he had not heard the deafening assault on the door, Scaggs would not believe him.

It was a nice question. But perhaps the latch of the door was stuck and Scaggs had not been patient enough to disengage it. He had never known the door to be locked during office hours before. The solution seemed the most plausible one. The situation must be handled with diplomacy. He stole

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forward and waiting for a lull in the storm said in a voice studiously respectful :

“Mr. Scaggs, have you tried turning the knob to the left?”

A soft answer turneth away wrath. This evidently does not apply to kind and friendly suggestions. There was a pause of a fraction of a second, during which Benjamin waited for thanks and approval, and then there opened the sluice gates of a veritable Niagara of frenzied and helpless wrath. The boy backed away and, thoroughly demoralized, broke for the stairs.

On the floor above he found the moving of the paint nearly complete. In awed accents he told of the struggle of the foreman, ending up with the statement that he was afraid to stay there any more. Margaret looked at the state of her campaign, and then handed the boy the key and remarked that the door might possibly be locked.

Benjamin did not view this part of the proceeding with pleasure. He hesitated, about to demur. But an idea occurred to him. He took the key and hurried down-stairs. Once there, he thrust it under the door and ran for his life.

The last box, containing all the loose cans that

THE THING TO DO WITH A KEY

were on the shelves, had been lowered into the wagon. The wagon was about to start down the alley, and the door unhooked preparatory to closing, when Scaggs thundered up the stairs. His face was crimson, his short, bristly whiskers stood out straight from his face and his teeth shone angrily between his lips. He looked more than ever like a red squirrel that had worked itself into a fit of apoplexy in a revolving cage.

“Stop that wagon! Stop that wagon!” he cried.

Just then the wind blew the door shut with a jar that reverberated through the old building, and drove every thought from his mind for a moment. Under cover of this Margaret stole quietly down the stairs.

At four o'clock that afternoon she put a check under Mr. Bundy's paper-weight.

CHAPTER IX

THE UNFASHIONABLE SQUARE

MR. BUNDY was more comfortable and contented with his work than he had ever been since his father's death. He was really more interested in the habits of insects than in anything else in the world, and viewed his business in the light of a necessary irritation. But since that business was now beginning to take on the appearance of order and was no longer a continual thorn in his side, he found he had abundant time to devote to the services of his bugs, and was correspondingly happy.

He had a little table all of his own in the inner office which was full of dire and grievous specimens of beetle. The more unwholesome a bug was in appearance, the more he seemed to love it. If a cold misshapen creature with hard shell and clinging feet dragged itself over the back of his hand he did not jump up hastily in alarm, but stopped to count the animal's feet. He was hail-fellow-well-met with any bug at all.

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Just now he was interested in a number of worm-like objects he kept domiciled in a fruit jar in the inner office. He would eagerly explain that these creatures were larvæ—larvæ that he had hatched out himself nearly three years before and nurtured with great care ever since. And caterpillar-like creatures that they were they scarcely seemed worth the trouble.

But in the darkened room they glowed with phosphorescence, which shone from rings that encircled their brown bodies. They were the offspring of a common species of glowworm—that is, as he would explain, they were the offspring of such an organism on their mother's side. But—and here was the excitement and interest of the whole matter—their father was a beetle.

At any rate, Bundy had been led by scientific statements to believe that the female of the species was a glowworm and the male was a beetle. This would scarcely seem like a probable conjugal arrangement, but Bundy believed in it, and he was proceeding to prove it. He had the young in his possession tightly sealed in a jar. He had been feeding their voracious throats with centipedes for three seasons now, and it was drawing near the time,

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according to the scientists, when they should decide what sex they were to be and take steps accordingly. Soon he would find out.

And it was high time. For it was no easy matter to feed his charges.

"I never knew centipedes to be so scarce," Bundy would complain, as though he were speaking of peaches, or watermelons. In days gone by it had been possible to step out into the woods beneath the waving leaves and gather a bounteous harvest. But he had exhausted whole colonies of them. Now he would spend his Saturday afternoons far up the river and would return with well-filled boxes of the desirable creatures. If he had kept it up much longer the state would have had to pass a game law to keep them from being exterminated.

But presently, all in due time, one of the worms decided he was to be a male and forthwith proceeded to bury himself in the ground. Bundy had waited three long patient years for this. His joy and excitement knew no bounds. It was actually going through the prophesied motions on its way to beetlehood. He had watched it day by day, like a proud father gazing at an only son. There was no overwhelming weight of worry upon him now and he

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would enjoy his simple little triumph with the pleasant consciousness of following in the footsteps of the scientists.

Margaret was keeping a very close watch on the stock-room. When she found they had on hand a large quantity of a certain kind of goods that was selling slowly, she would endeavor to get rid of the surplus, at cost, or sometimes at a little more, and let Mr. Bundy invest the money in something else that would sell more quickly. Naturally there were certain things for which there was no great demand, but which it was necessary for them to keep on hand, but she kept down the supply of these as close as she dared.

It was a varied and interesting business. The stores in all the towns down the river represented a growing community. Little stores in little towns had grown to be big stores in big towns within the memory of Bundy and Son ; and men drove up in automobiles now, whose fathers used to come in in rawhide boots and sometimes without collars upon their shirts. And even now the man who wore a broadcloth coat lined with fur received no greater welcome than the down-river fourth-class postmaster with the down-river mud on his boots. Men of al-

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most every stage of civilization entered on terms of absolute equality. But while she was there Margaret saw but one woman.

That happened one day as she was sitting alone in the office. She heard the rustle of a skirt and turned to see standing beside her a woman dressed in a brown suit of very fine cloth and wearing an expensive set of furs. The woman was about thirty-five or forty years old, and was quite good-looking.

"I am afraid I have come into the wrong place," she said, hesitating.

"No, you haven't," Margaret said. "Sit down and let me sell you some paint."

"Do you know," the woman confessed, "I thought this was a ship-chandler's place. It was so quaint and old-fashioned, it took my breath away to find all this office equipment. What I am looking for," she went on after a moment's hesitation, "is a pair of real old ship lamps. I am furnishing a den that is built just like a boat cabin, and I need the lamps. Perhaps you know of a place?"

"I do know of a place," replied Margaret, immediately. "It would be hard to direct you to it, but if you can wait twenty minutes, it will be time for me to leave and I can go with you."

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"I'll wait an hour."

She sat down and Margaret went on with her work. But when Mr. Bundy came in she rose, with a light of recognition in her eyes. He hesitated a moment. Then a look of relief came over his face.

"Oh, it's Miss Garnet, isn't it?" he exclaimed.

"Exactly, Mr. Bundy," she replied. "I didn't realize it was your office I was invading."

"The sign has gotten so weather-beaten I can scarcely read it myself," he said, apologetically.

She explained her errand, and said that Margaret had promised to go lamp-hunting with her. Bundy turned to Margaret.

"Oh—ah—Miss York, this is Miss Garnet," he explained by way of introduction. "Miss Garnet, like yourself, is also a notable business woman."

At this double-barrel endeavor to be complimentary, both women made a more or less successful effort to be retiring and deprecating. But it roused their interest in each other. When Margaret left to put on her hat and coat, Miss Garnet extracted a brief history of her from Mr. Bundy. And just as they were about to get into Miss Garnet's electric automobile preparatory to giving search for the lamps, Margaret contrived to have forgotten her handker-

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chief and returned to the office for the apparent purpose of getting it.

"Who is this Miss Garnet?" was what she asked, however, of Bundy.

Mr. Bundy shook off the cares of life long enough to laugh.

"Why," he said, "she's an interior decorator. Whenever any one has an abundance of money to invest in making a house a thing of beauty and a joy forever, he goes to Miss Garnet. She has a wide reputation and has made a great deal of money."

In order to get to the little ship-chandler's shop Margaret had in mind, they had to leave the automobile at the curb of one of the wide streets and walk up a narrow thoroughfare just wide enough to allow a vehicle to run between the curbs. On the thin little street, nestled between the rear of two large warehouses, sat a tiny shop with a dingy, small-paned show window through which could be seen dimly a collection of things of the sea—a storehouse of old iron and tarnished brass.

In the room on the second floor they found a treasure house of nautical plunder, and from its depths presently came forth the identical pair of

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lanterns Miss Garnet had pictured in her mind. But having received them she could not tear herself away. She was like a child in its grandmother's attic. She must see everything. The result was that it was late when they came out on the street again.

"You will dine with me to-night," announced Miss Garnet, as they stepped into the machine.

Margaret protested, but the other overruled her without ceremony.

"You must see my little house," she said. "I remodeled it myself, and designed everything in it. And like most people who have done that I am a perfect bore to all my friends with it."

"You see," she went on, "I found this little Colonial house—not in a very stylish location, but there facing the Square where it used to be stylish seventy years ago—and bought it for a ridiculously small sum. And, my dear, I tore out the whole inside of it, put in electric lights and lots of plumbing, and a garage in the basement, and made a place out of it. And being so unbelievably old, it is perfectly proper for me to live there without a chaperon. Although," she added, "I sometimes tire of that part of it. You live alone, don't you?"

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"Yes," said Margaret.

"Don't you get tired of it now and then?"

"I get tired of finding my room at night just exactly the same as it was in the morning when I left it—except," she amended, "for the things of mine the maid has kept for her own."

The machine slowed up by a quaint little house at the corner of a street opposite the Square. It swung round the corner and drove in between two lighted gate-posts at the side of the house. The wheels of the automobile, running over an iron bar in the short driveway, opened the garage doors before them and they rolled into shelter. Miss Garnet stepped out of the machine and turned on the light. Together they closed the doors and bolted them and went up the steps to the first floor.

They landed in a hallway from which started the stair to the upper floors. It was a delicate Colonial stair with four slender balusters on each step, each one turned in a different pattern. At the foot they curled into a spiral newel, the very centre of which was marked by a cut glass sphere which caught and reflected the red glow of the lamp on the table and seemed like a ball of fire resting there. On the floor was a soft eastern rug. Before her was the fire-

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place topped with a delicately moulded mantel shelf supported at each end by two slender Corinthian columns. On the andirons burned three logs, sputtering and crackling and sending dancing shadows over the ceiling.

Miss Garnet glanced at some mail on the mahogany side table and then led her guest up-stairs. She showed her into a dainty bedroom. The girl sank into a chintz-covered chair with a sigh of contentment. Whatever may be the advantages and virtues of a Spartan life, luxury and the appearance of luxury are inspiring and pleasant things. Margaret could not help wondering if her own business career would ever be so successful as to enable her to have a house of her own.

They had a good dinner in the quaint oval dining-room. Miss Garnet looked young and fresh in a black net dress which showed off her white neck and arms.

"I am wearing black now a good deal, my dear," she said. "It gives one a meretricious air of slenderness. If I continue to gain in weight, I shall have to take to rolling on the floor a hundred times before breakfast."

Margaret laughed.

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"Ah, well," Miss Garnet went on, "you are young and can afford to be optimistic. But the bloom of my youth is gone. The terrible thing about old age is it is inevitable. If it doesn't come at the end of five years it will come at the end of ten."

"I don't see why you look at it that way," responded the other. "If you have accomplished the things you have been working for, there is no ignominy—is that the word I mean?—in old age."

Miss Garnet drew an arm through hers.

"Sometimes," she said, "even then."

Margaret glanced at the clock in the hall.

"I must go," she said. "It is getting late."

"No, no," cried the hostess, "we are to have a visitor in a few minutes whom you must meet. He is a nice visitor—a rich young man, now at the perfect age of thirty-one. I think he is a little too rich—he can afford too many things to eat, and his figure is just a thought rotund. But he is a forceful person and his name is mentioned with respect by the newspapers. He doesn't scintillate, but he is solid. It is not possible to contradict him, for he converses about nothing he does not understand from the root up. For that reason he is apt to talk business."

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The front door bell rang.

"That is doubtless he—punctual to the dot," she said.

"I am sorry," said Margaret, "that I am not more elaborately dressed for so distinguished a visitor."

The maid announced "Mr. Potter." To her great surprise her own Mr. Potter entered.

"Oh," cried Miss Garnet, "I am so sorry you know each other. I thought I was to have the credit of bringing you to each other's notice."

"No," said Potter, "I must take the credit of having discovered Miss York myself."

"And," Margaret said, "I had not been working in his office more than a year when he advised me to leave."

"Willis Potter, I am ashamed of you!"

"To correct any wrong impression you may have," observed Mr. Potter, "I will say that the move was purely philanthropic. She was too good for us. Next to yourself, Miss Dora, she has a better equipped mind for dealing with business questions than any woman I know."

Margaret made him a mocking courtesy

"I suppose you mean," said Miss Garnet, "that for other purposes our minds are quite useless."

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"I did not say that. But still I have seen a thousand people who would be so glad to have good business heads that they would not care if they were perfect imbeciles otherwise.

"I am reliably informed," he added, smiling, "that you have made a very large sale of white enamel paint recently."

"Oh, Willis," said Miss Garnet, "please. Who wants to talk about white enamel paint so soon after dinner?"

"Miss York does, I am sure," said Potter, quietly.

"All right. If you're both sure you like that sort of thing ——"

"How did you hear about this episode?" Margaret demanded.

"I try to hear about everything that goes on," he said. "Are you the bookkeeper at Bundy and Son's," he asked presently, "as well as all the other things?"

"I want you," said Miss Garnet, "to be sure and wake me up when this business conversation is finished. One reason," she said to Margaret, "I can't let Willis Potter come often is he won't talk anything but shop. I can't cure him."

"I like it," said Margaret, frankly.

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"There, Mr. Potter. Here is a jewel. She actually likes it."

Potter waited patiently for this badinage to simmer down.

"What I was interested in finding out," he said, presently, "was whether you took any interest in the books at all. I don't suppose you have time to do the actual bookkeeping."

"I try to keep myself familiar with their methods. You know I took a special course in bookkeeping at night while I was with your company."

"Yes, I knew. What I was going to suggest was that you go over the accounts and see that none of those fellows down the river order too much from you."

"How could I tell?"

"Use your judgment," he said, smiling. "You see," he went on, "most of us here belong to a credit association that collects our bad accounts and warns us of firms whose financial condition is shaky. But Bundy said he wouldn't join. Said he knew more about his customers than any one else, and he was not going to pay any one else to tell him what he already knew. Well, he may be right, but I think a

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little extra care is necessary. This may be a suggestion for you."

"Thank you," she said.

"May I speak now?" asked Miss Garnet.

"Proceed," observed Potter.

"Why don't you change the name of Bundy and Son to Potter and York, or something like that? You aren't giving poor Bundy a show."

"Perhaps we shall."

Potter took Margaret home in his machine.

"That woman loves to irritate me," he told her. "She says I am—what is her expression—mentally deformed. She believes I am developed all in one direction. Naturally, I think always in terms of business. It is in the world of business I am accomplishing things, if anywhere at all."

"Oh, she merely enjoys teasing you," Margaret assured him.

"Yes, but there is always an air of superiority about her. She never takes me seriously, and I assure you I am a very serious person."

"I can well believe it."

The machine stopped at her door.

"This meeting was a pleasant coincidence," he said.

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"I think so."

He looked up at the sky.

"To-morrow is Sunday and has indications of being a pleasant spring day. How would you like to take a long automobile ride?"

"I should like it," she said.

As she went up-stairs to her room she was singing softly to herself.

CHAPTER X

CAVEAT VENDOR

THE intimacy between Miss Garnet and Margaret prospered. The fact that Margaret had ambition to succeed and was accomplishing things appealed to the other woman. It was as if she saw her own life lived over again. And Margaret, thrown with men all day long, enjoyed the companionship of a woman—for, strange as it may seem, women have been known to tire, momentarily, of men's society, and vice versa. Miss Garnet invited her to spend a week with her at the house on the Square. The week became two, three, a month—and Margaret was not allowed to go. It was an agreeable arrangement for both of them, for their living alone wore on them, as much upon Miss Garnet after fifteen years of it as upon Margaret after but two.

For the human being is not a solitary individual, but requires companionship. Dora Garnet's solitude

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had assumed the proportions of a malady. She could meet scores of people in other places, but her home was quiet and unresponsive. Some one had once diagnosed her condition and told her she was suffering from non-marriage. Which was nearer the truth than any one else had ever come. Her view of the world was too large. Her real home extended as far as she could travel on the trains. She was broad of vision. She saw the world as a big place and understood it, which was excellent for her business. But what she needed was focus. She needed a tiny spot, to which she could always come back and find home. And her house was not that.

If she had not succeeded in business so thoroughly, she would doubtless not have felt so strongly the grip of loneliness. Success was hers ; but like most people holding that heroic bauble in their grasp—be they men or women—found that in itself it was a powerless talisman. There was something lacking in her life—perhaps it was merely contentment, perhaps it was love. She had endeared no one to her. For while her genius had given pleasure to thousands of people, she could not but admit that was an accidental phase of it. She had pressed it only for her own good. There had been a man once—but the

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bright light ahead had been too strong. It was all she could see then. Now, perhaps——

It was with some vague intention of pointing out the path that she was led to devote herself to Margaret, and try, in her, to live over again her own life.

It was now spring. The fickle lady, who had been rubbing her eyes for some weeks past, was apparently awake. At any rate, she had smiled warmly upon the earth for a day or so, and then, as rain fell steadily for a week it might safely be surmised that she was taking her bath. It was a slack time for Bundy and Son. The river, swollen as usual at this time of the year, by the rain and the melting snows, ran high and swiftly by the wharves—a dirty orange stream, swirling and eddying and carrying along a great quantity of loot with it. It ran up over the pavement at the foot of Severn Street, and every day people stopped to compare the water's level with the high mark of 1883 and walked away disappointed. The river steamers which ran all winter long lay tied up at the wharves, and the trade of Bundy and Son came to a standstill. This period was eagerly looked forward to every year by the office force, as it gave them almost a holiday.

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Margaret spent her time with her nose deep in the books of the firm.

"Anything wrong, Miss York?" demanded Mr. Bundy, anxiously, at the end of two or three days of this.

"No, I am just finding out how much these various stores order and how often they do it. Also how long we have to wait for our money."

He chewed his mustache uneasily. A new method always annoyed him. It added complications.

"What is the advantage of that?" he asked.

"It keeps me occupied during the slack period, and I find out who the good and bad customers are—perhaps," she added, smiling.

"Oh," he said, relieved, and went away easier in his mind. Later in the day she came into the office.

"What sort of a person is this man Felix Groh, of Bay City?" she demanded.

He made a series of little dots on the blotter with his pencil.

"Why—all right—as far as I know. We never had any trouble with him. Why?"

"Just curiosity. I'm interested."

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"He's a short, stocky, stubborn German," he added, interested as soon as he found no business trouble was involved.

"Is his business good?"

"He has the biggest store in Bay City, and Bay City has now fifty thousand inhabitants—since they have built the shipyards there."

Later in the day a large, light-haired man, whose face was elusively familiar to her, entered the office. He knew her immediately, and spoke to her by name. Bundy looked up.

"Mr. Bundy," said the man, "my name is Evans. I am now with the Waring Company."

"How do you do?" replied Bundy, flustered, as he usually was when he could not decide what a man wanted to see him about. "Sit down. Have a seat. I've heard of you."

"Every one in the trade seems to have heard of me," said the man. "I have a reputation, but it doesn't do me much good. I've found that out trying to get into business by myself."

"Aren't you satisfied with Waring's?" demanded Bundy.

"No. It's too much like a machine. Potter treats every man up there just like a cog in a wheel.

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He would no more show gratitude to a man for helping him out than he would pour champagne over his electric fan for keeping him cool."

Bundy made a noise in his throat indicative of sympathy.

"Why, after Number 1088 had made such a hit I went in and asked Potter what he was going to do for me. He said, 'Why, Evans, I feel now that we are justified in keeping you. If you hadn't made the discovery we should have had to let you go.'"

"Comforting," said Bundy.

Margaret looked up. "Didn't he offer you at one time," she asked pleasantly, "a little less money and a royalty on anything you discovered?"

"I didn't know that was generally known," replied Evans, in surprise. "Why, yes, he did. But it was a reduction of half in my salary, and a royalty on the net receipts of the discovery, which meant that before I began to get royalties, a proportion of the expenses, salaries, interest charges and dividends had to be charged against it, which would leave very little for me. I wasn't impressed with that offer."

Evans looked at her thoughtfully.

"Of course," he went on, after consideration,

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"Mr. Potter has a difficult business to keep up. He has to hew right up to the line, and if somebody gets hit by the chips I suppose you can't blame him. They call him the Iron Duke, you know. His power lies in the fact that he drives ahead. And if you are lying with your foot in front of the steam roller, he won't stop the engine. He knows you ought not to have it there."

"He has been very decent to us," said Mr. Bundy. "He has made several suggestions that have helped us in our business."

"Why shouldn't he?" demanded the other. "Bundy and Son is one of the most valuable outlets the Waring Company has. You can sell goods for them that they cannot find a market for anywhere else. You have a unique set of customers. They couldn't afford to have anything happen to you. I once heard Mr. Waring say he considered Bundy and Son as essential to him as any department of his own organization."

Bundy looked at him in mild surprise. "I had no idea of that," he said.

"But I am detaining you with idle gossip," Evans went on. "What I want to know is this. Suppose you had a chance to get control of a discovery equal

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to if not better than Number 1088. Would it interest you?"

"Control?" asked Bundy, fidgeting in his chair.

"Yes, so you could manufacture it. You have the trade already. All you have to do is to manufacture the material and the rest runs of its own momentum. You would clean up twenty thousand dollars a year."

The other bit his mustache.

"And I might lose twenty. No, no," he broke off, almost irritably. "I can't touch anything new."

"All right," said Evans. He saw immediately that it was useless to talk to Bundy. Presently he rose to go.

"Have you protected yourself in this new discovery? Has the Waring Company any chance to claim it?"

"No. Everything was done in my own time and with my own materials."

"Sorry I can't join you," said Bundy, a little uncomfortable at having been abrupt with him. "I hope you have better success elsewhere."

Evans acknowledged this belated diplomacy.

"Oh," he said, turning back as he was about to go, "I heard Mr. Waring say to Potter the other

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day, 'Are Bundy and Son going to be caught in the Groh affair?' And Potter said he thought not—he believed he had fixed that. I don't know what it means, but it may be a tip for you."

Bundy looked at him blankly. "Thank you," he said.

Evans left. The telephone rang and Bundy, answering it, forgot all about the visitor's speech. But under Margaret's skin a flush had deepened, and her lips were tightly closed.

About a week later as they were sitting over the desk, Mr. Bundy passed over a letter.

"You were talking about Felix Groh some days ago," he said. "Here is a whopping big order from him."

"Mr. Bundy," she replied, after she had looked it over, "you remember what Evans said about our being caught by Groh, don't you?"

"Yes, but I didn't understand it."

"Then listen to this," she went on. "Groh has been buying from us for the last three or four years about a hundred dollars' worth a month and paying for it at the end of thirty days. But in January and in February and again in March, he bought over twice as much and hasn't paid for any of it."

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Bundy smoothed the hair at the back of his head uneasily.

"Are you sure about that?" he muttered, and then walked out into the other room.

"Yes, that's right," he said, glumly, when he returned after about fifteen minutes, during which she knew he was out there looking at the same old figures over and over again, as if he were hoping they might change while he was considering them.

"This order," said Margaret, holding the letter, "is the biggest one yet. I think we had better not fill it."

"What! and lose one of our best customers?" he exclaimed.

"You aren't anxious to give anything away, are you?" she demanded. "He owes you seven hundred dollars already."

He poked little holes in his blotter with his pencil.

"I don't like to offend these fellows," he said, hesitatingly.

"Let's not offend them, then. You hold up this order for a while, and send me down to Bay City to see whether I can find out what the trouble is. If I don't find anything wrong you can ship the order. If I do, you will have a good reason for demanding

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payment on the account before shipping anything more to him."

Bundy drew a sigh of relief.

"All right," he said, "go ahead."

When at the end of the day she had put on her hat and coat and was ready to go, he looked up at her with a puzzled expression.

"Evans said Potter had made the remark that he had 'fixed things' so that we would not be caught by Groh. I wonder what Potter could have meant by that."

Margaret's face became set and hard.

"Mr. Bundy," she said, "whenever you want to know the means by which Mr. Potter preserves Bundy and Son for his own purposes, you are safe in saying I am that means."

CHAPTER XI

A LADY WITHOUT SHOES

FROM Severn Street wharf to Bay City is seventy-five miles by the river. From Severn Street station to Bay City by rail is one hundred and twenty miles. If you will think of the Greek letter Δ and consider the apex of it as Bay City and the lower right-hand corner as the metropolis in which the house of Bundy and Son is located, you will have an idea of the two routes between the cities. The right-hand side of the letter is the route the boats traveled down the South River. The train, however, proceeded first along the lower side to the left-hand corner, where passengers were disgorged and reloaded on a minor and less efficient train which transported them in a leisurely manner up the remaining side of the triangle to Bay City, the track following the course of the wide, listless, unnavigable Western Branch, a beautiful stream which poured its lazy complacent waters into the South River at Bay City and was swept almost immediately out into the

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turmoil of the bay where it knew peace no more. At the point where one changed cars from the first train into the second this Western Branch was spanned by a venerable wooden bridge, which had the perpetual quality of always being able to convince the railroad company that it would last just one year more.

The train which Margaret was to take for Bay City left at ten o'clock that night. It arrived at the railroad bridge at twelve, the Bay City sleeper was left behind to be attached to the local which left at about four in the morning, and, making poor time of the thirty miles, got to the destination at six o'clock.

As Margaret waited on the platform she had a pleasurable sense of excitement, which the smell of the smoke and the ringing of locomotive bells never failed to arouse in her. Riding on the train as a game was just as alluring to this lady of twenty-two as it had been to the little girl of two with the cheeks like red apples. The train pulled in with a great screeching of air brakes, the porters alighted with their little stools, she made her way along the bewildering line of cars asking every person in a blue uniform the same question, until at last she found

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her destination, surrendered her bag, mounted the steps and walked down the canyon between the green curtains, greatly disturbed by their changing contour, hunting for a number. She found it at length.

The train started, her bag was presently brought to her and her ticket taken away from her. Margaret disappeared presently between the curtains of her berth. The train rumbled on, lights flashed by the windows, and then, after a while, all was steady darkness. It was some time later, just as she was passing from consciousness into the land of dreams that she heard a strangely familiar voice as some one walked up the aisle. She was wide awake in a minute, but she could not decide where she had heard that voice before or whether perhaps she had merely dreamed she had heard it.

Presently she fell into a condition of mental suspension that is possible in a sleeping car, during which the victim, while not awake, seems to be aware of the steady roll of the wheels, the deep-toned baying of the locomotive whistle, and the steady procession of human beings up and down the aisle, talking in low tones muffled by the heavy curtain. Then without having been asleep she woke to find

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the train standing still. The voice of some one talking rose up beneath her window and passed on quickly, dying off into a mere murmur. Raising the window shade she looked out, apparently into space. Then she saw by the faint moonlight that the train was standing on a trestle or bridge, and she was looking over a wide expanse of water.

She lay down again, and lulled by the stillness, fell asleep. When she awoke they were still standing on the bridge, and the same expanse of water lay spread out before them. She looked at her watch—it was half-past twelve. This must be the railroad bridge over the Western Branch. She waited a while longer staring idly through the glass. Then curiosity got the better of her. She began to dress.

It was constant traveling in a sleeping-car berth that made an alert man believe that if he could assume his clothes in such a space, he could allow himself to be handcuffed and put in a trunk, and escape from the same without assistance. It was a very simple idea, and it was strange no one had ever thought of it before, but the man made a fortune from it. Margaret felt that she had indeed accomplished a feat when she emerged from her berth,

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fully clad—that is, fully clad except her shoes. The porter had them somewhere polishing them.

This was rather unexpected. She hesitated a moment. Her first thought was that she would have to return to her couch, as she did not care to walk about in a public conveyance without shoes. But as everything was fairly dark and no one at all seemed to be stirring, she thought she might safely run the chance of her absence of foot-gear's passing unnoticed.

This car was the last one of the train, and, remembering that the pillows in the berths were placed toward the engine, she got her bearings and proceeded toward the rear. Standing on the platform in the ghostly glow of the green marking lantern stood a brakeman. She approached him. He looked up and started when he saw her.

"I didn't hear you come," he said.

He picked up the lantern that stood on the step.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Well," he replied, "I suppose you might as well know. The bridge is down."

"Down?" she repeated. "Whereabouts?"

He swung himself from the car.

"Out there over the deep water."

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"Then we are here for all night?" she asserted, in the tone of a question.

But he was gone. She watched his lantern bobbing as he walked back over the trestle. She walked down the steps. There was a plentiful sprinkling of lanterns ahead, but no apparent activity. Presently the figure of a man approached her, walking on the board that ran along the ties beside the train. She retired to a secluded place on the platform. He stopped as he reached the rear of the train, and laid hold of the handles.

"Mr. Brakeman," he observed, peering up into the semi-darkness, "that's a bad mess ahead."

She might have noticed something about his voice if she had not been so much amused by his remark. She laughed.

"If you can see that light away back there," she observed, demurely, "that is the brakeman."

"I beg your pardon," he said. He hesitated a moment, embarrassed, and then made a move as if to go forward again. But she needed information.

"What is the chance," she asked, "of our getting through to-night?"

"None at all, I should say," he replied.

"Is it as bad as that?"

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"There are about fifty yards of bridge out there," he informed her, "sagging like a clothes-line. No train could run on it."

"Meanwhile, what is to happen to us?"

"We are free to do as we please. I suppose," he added, "they will have a temporary track fixed by noon to-morrow—certainly not sooner, from the look of things."

"Noon!" she repeated.

If they did not get across before noon she would not be in Bay City until after the close of business the next day. A whole day's delay would be serious. She tapped the floor impatiently with her foot—until she touched a cool bolt-head, and, remembering it was unshod, hastily recalled the foot to the shelter of her skirts.

"I must get to Bay City," she said.

"If they run a train back to the City," he observed, "you could take a boat from there. If we wait here, we can either possess our souls in patience until they fix the bridge, or we can trust to luck that some one will come along and row us over in the morning."

"What are you going to do yourself?" she asked after a time.

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"I have a wild scheme."

He glanced down the track toward the stationary point of light of the brakeman's lantern. She looked at him, waiting, and wondered idly what the man looked like. There was about his movements a suggestion of some one she had known.

"What is your scheme?" she asked.

"I'm thinking of walking back there and down the bank. I think I know where to find a motor boat a relative of mine owns—uses it to go duck shooting. Then I could get across and catch that other train."

"Come on, let's do it," was what she did not say. But she wanted to say it. For once in her life she wished she were a man.

"Of course," he said, "that is rather a hazy scheme, since I have never found this boat in the dark."

There was something familiar about his voice. What if she, by some chance, had met him? Wouldn't it be proper then for her to suggest going with him? She must get to Bay City.

If she could only see his face. But he would insist upon standing down there. She felt in her purse, took out something that felt like a five-cent

A LADY WITHOUT SHOES

piece and, watching her chance, let it fall upon the platform. Immediately he mounted the steps.

"You've dropped something," he informed her.

"Have I?" she asked, looking him firmly in the eyes.

He was about to stoop to get her money. He stopped. There was a short silence in which astonishment smothered speech.

"Why, Margaret!" he exclaimed, at length.

"Why didn't you tell me who you were?"

"Why didn't you? Come on in where it is light and let's talk it over."

"I—I can't. I haven't my shoes."

He laughed—a deep, boyish laugh.

"I know," he said. "I was like that. But I discovered where they are hid. What were yours like? I'll get them."

She caught him by a fold of his sleeve.

"Go in front of me, David. I'll follow you and pick them out myself."

CHAPTER XII

THE RIVER NIGHT

“**Y**OU'RE here first,” he suggested. “Take the best pair.”

She slipped her feet into her own shoes, and looked at the others.

“I think I have,” she said.

They stepped back into the narrow aisle that ran along by the windows.

“Now, let's go,” she suggested.

“Where?”

“For the motor boat. I have to be in Bay City in the morning, child.”

“Have you much luggage?”

“Just a tiny bag.”

“That's all I have, too.” His eyes shone. “All right,” he exclaimed, “I'm game.”

He got her hand-bag from the berth.

“I'll take it,” she insisted.

“Pooh! Don't be self-reliant,” he said. “If I carry one in each hand it balances.”

Between the north-bound and the south-bound

THE RIVER NIGHT

tracks ran a board about twelve inches wide. They stepped down from the car upon this and began to walk back toward the brakeman. It was not a comfortable thing to do. They could look down between the ties and see the water shining dimly thirty feet below them. Margaret felt all the time that she was doing a very perilous and difficult thing, although it is a well-known fact that it is no feat of skill for a human being to walk on a plank one foot wide. It would have taken great care for her to have squeezed herself through one of the spaces between the ties and drop down, but nevertheless it seemed dangerous.

The brakeman carried on a short conversation with them and was convinced that they were absolutely foolhardy. But he had no interest in being at Bay City in the morning. They passed by his comforting light and into the darkness beyond. She got so tired looking at her feet that she vowed she would never look at them again. And yet she did not dare to look anywhere else.

It was not more than a hundred and fifty yards, yet it seemed like a mile. She was immeasurably relieved when at last they came to broken stones between the ties instead of just space. They walked

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but a little way on this, and then suddenly turned aside and started down the side of the embankment. Her companion held one of the bags in his left hand and the other under his arm, so as to leave his right hand free to help her. The quarter-full moon, disappearing in the west, threw a little light on their pathway—just enough to enable them to avoid colliding with big stones and telegraph pole guy-wires, but not enough to prevent them from stumbling over unexpected irregularities in the ground. Sometimes they would sink in over their ankles and slide in the shifting soil. At the bottom they had to take off their shoes and get “rid of ballast,” as David put it.

They continued down an easier slope to the river bank. There they found a pathway and walked silently along it, the man leading the way carrying the bags, she following after, her eyes glued to the back of his head. They took the whole occasion seriously, and plodded along with a grim determination.

“How does this kinsman of yours happen to keep a power boat in this fearful location?” she demanded at length.

“It is not so bad in the daytime,” he replied, laughing. “Why, this kinsman of mine—who is

THE RIVER NIGHT

my brother-in-law—keeps the boat here so that when he wants to go ducking, he can come up the night before, sleep in a house up there on the hill and start off before sunrise in the morning.”

“It sounds extravagant to have a boat just for that.”

“That’s the sort of man he is. Whatever he does, he does thoroughly. He makes money fast, and spends it fast. He wouldn’t enjoy shooting ducks unless he had his own boat to go in. John treats himself as royalty and everything surrounding him has to be absolutely the best.”

“I think I see it now,” she cried, suddenly.

They walked a little further and there lay a power boat anchored to a buoy out in the river. After some search they discovered a rowboat lying on the bank back from the water’s edge chained to a tree. He took two careful steps forward to another tree and, striking a match, found the key cleverly concealed in the crotch of it. The boat was freed and launched. He helped her in, and getting in himself rowed out toward the launch. As she looked at him in the dim light it was hard to realize that he was David Bruce. He seemed still only like the man who had talked to her on the car platform.

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"Say something," she exclaimed. "I can't get you placed in my mind."

"Well," he said, laughing, "three weeks ago I landed on this side. Ever since then I have been staying with my sister and her husband in Bay City. Is that the kind of speech you wanted?"

"Yes, thank you," she returned. "I think I shall begin to recognize you in a little while."

He pulled alongside of the power boat, rolled back the tarpaulin that covered her cockpit and held the little boat close to the gunwale while she climbed aboard the larger one. Then he came aboard himself, fastened the smaller boat astern, and lighted an oil lamp in the little cabin. He knelt down before the engine.

"This is where you will see my true self revealed," he observed, looking at the mechanism apprehensively.

But when he threw on the switch and had made several attempts at the fly-wheel, it at length turned all the way over and the engine fell into a reassuring chug-chug-chug.

He cast off from the buoy and threw the engine in gear. They started swiftly forward, the little tender astern straining at its line and skipping over the

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water, the exhaust shooting like a machine gun and a broadening wake sweeping off to each side behind them. In the distance they could see the lights of the train still lying on the bridge. In the sky beyond, the moon was just touching the tree-tops.

"My father wrote me," he said, presently, "that you were earning your own living now—and doing extremely well too, he said. I suppose this is a business trip to Bay City."

She nodded. He thought a moment.

"In that case," he said, "I suggest that instead of just crossing the river, we run all the way to Bay City. It is only thirty-five miles. And you can get some sleep in the little cabin there. You will need it if you have to use your brain in the morning."

"But how about you?" she objected.

"Oh," he replied, carelessly, "I am just as I always was. I do not need sleep."

"You never seem to grow up," she said. "Is it still stained glass?" she asked.

"Why, no," he replied, "I haven't done much with the stained glass lately. I went to Chartres to study the glass in the Cathedral there, but—well, there happened to be a large aeroplane factory at Chartres and I got interested in aeroplanes."

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"And now you are going to build an aeroplane?"

"Why shouldn't I?" he demanded, stoutly.

"No reason, if you are going to continue to build aeroplanes. But it isn't wholesome to start things and leave them half done. The half-done things in the world don't help it a particle."

"I know," he replied, "but I have to get started right."

"Yes, but hurry."

He laughed good-naturedly.

"And now go into the cabin," he said, "and sleep."

She turned obediently and went into the cabin. Here she took off some of her clothes, and, wrapping herself in a blanket, was soon asleep on the cushion of the lockers that ran along the side. As for David, he sat by the wheel, filled with a keen enjoyment of the rippling water, of the dark sky with its thousands of stars casting their dim glow upon the night, and of the great breadth and the great mystery of the world about him.

CHAPTER XIII

BAY CITY

MARGARET slept as soundly as a child. When she awoke gray daylight was peeping in at the port-holes of the cabin. She dressed and went out into the cockpit where David was sitting. They were on a broad stretch of water broken by little tumbling waves which splashed against the bows of the boat. Far ahead, touching the dark line of the distant shore, hung the striped blanket of the morning sky, gorgeous in gray and flaring crimson. The water between glowed with the light, and across it, skimming its surface so near that their wings splashed in the waves, flew the white gulls. To starboard lay a low island scarcely peeping over the water's edge, from whose flat breast grew fresh-budded trees that waved in the morning breeze. Astern was the awakening city. A cloud of hazy smoke hung above it, and the buildings shining in the level rays of the sun stood out against the deep sky beyond like a model of a city against a dark curtain.

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"Where are you going?" she asked, rubbing her eyes.

"I am merely cruising. You were not awake when we passed the city, and I came out here to look at some property."

"What do you mean?"

He pointed to the island on which grew the trees.

"That is my island," he said. "I found it had never been claimed by any one, so I went to the county court-house, paid a fee of about ten dollars, and they wrote down in a big book that it belonged to me. It is an amphibious island. It lives above water most of the year, but when the river rises it is completely submerged."

"What is the object of this ownership?" she asked, presently.

"I want to build my aeroplane there. You see, I am working on a new scheme for a machine which will rise out of the water—a hydro-aeroplane, you know." He threw over the wheel and the bow swung round. "I think we might as well go back now. I am as hungry as a sea-gull, aren't you?"

"How do you propose to dispose of me?" she asked, curiously.

"Take you to my sister."

BAY CITY

"I ought to be ashamed to go, after this perfectly appalling adventure."

But having gone through the appalling adventure, as she called it, there was in her a sense of having stolen for a moment a glimpse behind the curtain of another world. She felt this vaguely—as a person would who was not altogether conscious that beneath her calm, cool surface dwelt a warm living woman.

Beyond a doubt it had been an adventure—unusual enough, coming in her level desk-and-letter life, to remind her that the world was a many-sided place; and to point out to her that she, steady-going business woman though she was, was not at all insensible to the influence of sentiment and romance. Sentiment and romance! She glanced whimsically at David, and wondered what he would have thought had he guessed he had been the innocent cause of putting those two words into her mind.

The household of John Sawyer, David's brother-in-law, was not a little surprised, nevertheless, when it came down to breakfast, to find Margaret and David sitting in the hall. Of course it was not possible to lay the whole story before them with one

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well-chosen sentence, but the two mariners, after some few minutes of disjointed narrative, managed to assuage the Sawyer curiosity to such an extent that the latter were able to think of asking their guests to breakfast, which, after all, was the strategic point of the interview.

Margaret had never met John Sawyer before. He was a tall man of about forty with a black mustache and a deep, rotund voice. Elsie Bruce had married him when Margaret had been about twelve years old. She remembered David's coming to Mr. Lacey's house wearing a very tight new suit which had been made expressly for the wedding and explaining in detail about the quantity of ice-cream he had been permitted to eat, and her own sorrow, at the time, that she had no sister to get married, too.

"I consider this a very romantic episode," commented Mr. Sawyer, when the story, with all its details, had at last been completed.

Margaret did not admit that the same thought had passed vaguely through her mind.

"You must discourage that idea," she said, smiling. "I was sent below to sleep the moment that it ought to have become romantic."

"I thought if she was to attend to business to-

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day," David explained, "she ought to have her beauty sleep."

John Sawyer looked at her with interest.

"Are you one of these business women?" he asked.

"In a very small way. I have come down here," she added, at length, "to find out about Felix Groh."

"Oh, ho!" he cried.

"Well?" she demanded.

"I said nothing."

"You said, 'oh, ho.'"

He pulled a cigar from his pocket and balanced it in his hand.

"May I ask what firm you—ah—represent?"

"Bundy and Son."

"Bundy and Son!"

He said nothing for a moment. Then he rose from the table.

"Let's go in here and have this thing out," he said, after breakfast. "About Bundy and Son—I am informed that Groh has been—ordering heavily from your firm. We have just awaked to this situation ourselves," he went on. "Groh owes our firm nearly three thousand dollars. To a firm in

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New York it is four. There are eight creditors in all."

"Our amount is small—only seven hundred dollars, as you doubtless know. But he ordered five hundred dollars' worth more, and we hesitated about filling it."

"You saved five hundred dollars by that," he asserted.

"Is it as bad as that?" she demanded.

"It may be," he said, seriously. "Let me explain the situation to you. This little German, Groh, has a large store in which he sells a little bit of everything. Until about a year ago he had been making a fair living. But he got interested in an old fellow who claims to have discovered an absolute wood preservative, something that will make wood as enduring as concrete. Of course that's a good discovery, if it's true, and Groh had visions of millions of dollars from the invention. So he rented a great big barn across the river and started a factory."

Mr. Sawyer stopped to knock the ash off his cigar.

"All of which was a very ambitious and a very praiseworthy thing to do, except that he did not take into consideration the fact that he had to make

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other people believe what he believed before they would buy his product. He did not realize how much money it would require for advertising, and he did not realize how hard the proof of that particular kind of thing would be. You can see, of course, when you try to sell a man a preparation to make wood last indefinitely, his first question is, 'How can you prove that it will make it last indefinitely?' "

She nodded.

"Well, he got in deeper and deeper, spent all his money and was face to face with the necessity of spending more. He couldn't borrow it, so he hit upon the scheme of pushing his credit. He bought just as much as the dealers would let him have and sold it at a low price—sometimes at cost—in order to dispose of it quickly. All that money went. But, although the product was well advertised, he had no selling organization capable of selling it. If his name had been well known, he might have made a big thing of it. But as it is——" Mr. Sawyer made a gesture with his hand.

"What does the wave of your hand mean?" Margaret asked. "Bankruptcy?"

"Ordinarily it would. But Groh hasn't anything.

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Most of his creditors were in town yesterday, and our firm suggested an informal meeting of these men to discuss the situation. Finally we decided that rather than realize a little money by bankruptcy proceedings, and force a really good customer out of business, it would be better to let him off with the provision that he give up this wood preservative venture. Then if he will give us each a note for what he owes us and stick tight to business, he can soon be on his feet again."

"Will he agree to that?"

"Personally, I hardly think he will without some further concession. I believe he will insist on getting something in return for the money he has put in the business over the river. He is a pig-headed little man, and his first thought will be that we are trying to deprive him of his rights to the discovery and make all the money ourselves."

"It seems a shame, doesn't it," she said, presently, "that he should have wasted all that money?"

"And it is doubly a shame," he agreed, "when you consider that he has prepared the ground for some one, if there were only some one to step in and reap the profits—some firm with an established list of customers who could take advantage

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of what advertising has been done and turn it into money."

He glanced at her very keenly.

"What do you think of this wood preservative?" she asked, presently.

"They have some tests over there," he replied, "that have convinced a good many people. They take a log of wood and coat one-third of it with their paint, one-third of it with ordinary paint and leave the remaining third unpainted. They put that log of wood through enough soaking in water and burying underground and floating in swamps and so forth, to drive a log of wood crazy. I saw one that had been buried underground for a year, and certainly the part covered with the preservative looked as good as new."

He arose and walked up and down the room.

"Do you know what I think?" he said.

"No," she replied, smiling.

"I think," he exclaimed, "there might be a fortune for some one in that if properly managed. And the easiest part of it is, it wouldn't cost a penny to try it out. Groh could be bought out for a thousand dollars, and there is a thousand dollars' worth of the stuff to be sold. There is the factory and organiza-

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tion in complete working order ready to make more as soon as you need it. It's merely a chance to bet nothing against a million dollars."

He stopped in front of her.

"Would Mr. Bundy consider such a proposition?" he demanded.

She looked at him absently.

"I don't know," she said.

What she was really thinking was, "I have a thousand dollars of my own."

CHAPTER XIV

DUSK AND STARLIGHT

“**W**HERE’S David?” asked Mr. Sawyer, as he took up his hat preparatory to leaving for his office.

“He has gone to bed for a while,” his wife returned. “He is tired out.”

“Wake him up about ten o’clock, won’t you? I want him to take Miss York to see the paint factory of Groh’s. I’d go myself, but I’m so busy. Since the launch is here that will be the very best way to go.”

Mrs. Sawyer nodded. He kissed her and disappeared in a whirlwind of haste. If the speed with which husbands dash away from their firesides in the morning could be maintained all day long, the average of prosperity throughout the Union would increase by leaps and bounds. Mrs. Sawyer settled herself comfortably in her chair.

“My husband doesn’t approve of my brother at all,” she observed. “You aren’t thinking of marrying David, are you?” she asked, abruptly.

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"Not yet."

"I thought you were not. I can talk about him freely then."

"I imagine Mr. Sawyer disapproves of David's not having a fixed occupation."

"Yes. We all do that, of course. But John lectures about it, and David argues with him on the subject. And David's arguments make John furious."

"What does he say?"

"David says John is a waster. He points to his automobile and his motor boat and his cigars and his clothes, and he proves that John wastes about twice as much every year as David spends. And that is true, for my dear husband must have the best of everything. David says his own income is sufficient for his own needs. He insists that business prosperity such as the world applauds and such as John possesses, is actuated by nothing but a desire to purchase a few more things for one's self."

"And that spirit," Margaret said, thoughtfully, "is simply the result of his extreme aversion to commercialism. But some day it is going to be necessary for him to go dollar-hunting. And then I believe he will go with a vim. Don't you?"

"Yes. But he needs something to touch a match

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to the powder. He isn't serious at all. There is a nice old lady in this town who is anxious to have him paint her portrait, and he refuses. He says he doesn't like her looks. And it would mean several hundred dollars to him."

"I can't understand that. But then, of course, I'm working in an atmosphere where it is considered criminal to fail to earn a dollar."

"And yet, here is another thing. David is just as frugal as a mouse. He lived on much less than his income abroad. In fact, he helped to support several of the men who would otherwise have been unable to stay there at all."

"Of course," Margaret agreed, "there are many hopeful things about him."

"I think David is a sturdy character," asserted his sister. "He has the courage to follow his own inclinations, no matter what other people say—which is a quality few of us possess."

David came down a little after ten o'clock looking just as fresh as if he had had a full night's sleep. He and Margaret went off together to take their trip to the factory in the launch.

"I feel very humble indeed beside such a brilliant business woman," he said.

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"Don't ridicule me, David," she replied. "That is the very reason why you have a supreme contempt for me."

"Whatever supreme feeling I have for you," he contradicted, "it is not contempt."

The little launch chugged across the river carrying them toward the big stone barn which was Felix Groh's factory. They landed; and from that moment Margaret spoke scarcely a word to him. Her attention was riveted upon the plant. She did not even observe the interest with which all her actions were noted.

"What do you see now?" he demanded, as they approached the barn, and she stopped suddenly.

"I was looking at those plants," she said, pointing to a number of green rows under careful cultivation. "They do not look like any vegetables I know of. What do you think they are?"

"That is one of the things I don't know," he replied.

A middle-aged man met them at the door. He said his name was Venn, and that Mr. Sawyer had telephoned that she was coming. He had white hair, and a white beard and mustache. There was a dreamy, far-away look in his eye, and she picked

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him for the man who had discovered the wood preservative even before he told her. She spent a very long time with this gentleman going over the establishment, while David, weary, famished, bored, wandered about like a lost soul until finally he amused himself painting an impressionist picture of the barn on the back of a shingle with some of the wood preservative he had found in a half-empty can.

The white-haired gentleman showed Margaret samples of wood that led her to believe the preservative had many properties that were claimed for it. After that the first question she asked him was—how much did it cost to make it? As she expected, he replied that he did not know. So they went to the fragmentary books that he kept in the little boxed-off office at the corner of the building. Mr. Sawyer had evidently been very emphatic, because the man was willing and anxious to show everything—except that he let fall no word about the process by which his precious product was made.

With infinite labor and pains they got the cost of all the materials that had been purchased in the preceding three months, the amount paid for all labor and the amount expended for repairs on the build-

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ing and machinery. She found out from him how much rent Mr. Groh paid, the approximate value of the machinery and how long it might be expected to last before it had to be renewed. To extract this information from the man required skilful surgery, because these things did not interest him, and it was hard for him to concentrate his mind on them sufficiently to remember. Then she found out how much of the product had been manufactured in that time. From all these things she at length managed to find out how much it cost to make the product. She returned to David tired out.

She revived sufficiently, however, to ask about the rows of green plants that had aroused her curiosity.

"What vegetable is that?" she demanded.

"Oh," Venn replied, with a spark of interest, "it is a weed I am cultivating. I extract a kind of oil from it that I sell to the county wheelwrights. They use it to thin out their paints—in the place of turpentine."

"In the place of turpentine!"

"Yes. It seems to have all the properties of turpentine, except that it has a sweet odor. It costs very little to manufacture."

DUSK AND STARLIGHT

"That's curious. Can you let me have a little of it?"

"Certainly."

The man disappeared.

"How did you stand it?" asked David, scratching out some high lights in his sketch with a penknife.

"I am a wreck. Can't we do something soothing to the nerves right away?"

"Indeed we can. As soon as that old chap brings back your medicine, I know the very thing to do."

The man returned presently with a small bottle of colorless fluid, which he presented to her. She shook hands with him and followed David to the launch.

A fine warm sun was shining. He put cushions on the seat beside the steering-wheel and arranged others so that she could lean against the cabin. And although it was not really cold, he spread a blanket over her knees and tucked it in about her feet. She shrugged herself luxuriously into its folds.

"Now I feel comfortable," she said. "I am apt to purr at any moment."

He started the engine and steered out into the deeper water.

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"Want to know where we are going?" he asked.

"No. I don't want to have to think again to-day."

"It would be a fine opportunity to run off with you."

"I don't care," she said, lazily. "Do anything you please with me."

They ran on down the stream, partly carried by the current, past the docks and cranes of the ship-yards, past the freight wharf where a river boat lay, idly spurting steam, while an army of ants rolled barrels and boxes up her gangplanks. She viewed these things contentedly, as matters which ran on of their own momentum, without her having to lift one of the hands which lay warm under the cover.

"Are you going to cross the ocean with me?"

"Sailing under sealed orders now," he replied. "However," he added, "you may rest assured that if we cross the ocean I shall go with you."

"That was all I wanted to know, of course," she observed, sighing contentedly.

They passed into the broad water, beyond the cape which shielded the South River. The current of the latter brought waves, and the launch began to rise and fall gently as she cut through them.

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The spray that broke now and then over the bows carried back the smell of deep waters to them. She closed her eyes.

"I have not the slightest intention of ever leaving this boat," she asserted.

When they got well out into the larger river, he turned down-stream.

"The shore behind us has changed," she informed him, opening her eyes. "That clump of trees that was over there is now over here."

"Oh, yes, I exercise complete control over them," he replied, seriously. "I move them by merely turning this wheel."

She closed her eyes again.

"I am glad to be in such good hands," she murmured.

They ran along in easy comfort for a while. Presently he went below and shut off the engine. The launch slid along of its own momentum. Margaret glanced over the side; and there appeared suddenly a strip of land which moved by them, growing wider and wider. It was covered with undergrowth, and a clump of large trees grew in the middle of it. As their speed diminished, David ran forward and caught a stout stake that stuck up out of the water.

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To this he made the launch fast with a line. It swung around until the stern pointed down-stream.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "this is your island, isn't it?"

"Yes. Would you like to go ashore?"

"I am at your disposal, sir," she replied.

She gazed at the ten or fifteen feet of water that lay between the boat and shore.

"What do we do about that?" she asked, with a pleasant show of interest. "Wait until it evaporates?"

"You either wade ashore," he said, "or you have some one carry you."

"I wouldn't step into that cold water," she observed, glancing again at the river, "for a month's pay."

He was already taking off his shoes. In a moment he stepped overside.

"Come on," he directed.

"I don't want to move."

"You needn't."

He came aboard and lifted her, blanket and all, to the edge of the deck. Then, stepping into the water once more, he swung her off with a good strong heave, carried her not only to the shore, but

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from there on up the path toward the clump of trees.

"I'm having a larger journey than I was promised, aren't I?"

"I can't put you down now until I find a place for you."

In a moment she found herself sitting in the sunshine with her back against a tree, the blanket still around her.

"It's convenient to know you so well, David," she observed, smoothing the woolen folds over her knees. "Otherwise I should have had to walk."

"And yet when you think of it," he replied, "you have seen so little of me of late years that you hardly do know me."

"Yes. I find myself getting acquainted with you day by day. But what I meant, of course, is, it has been so long since I first clapped eyes on you that I can safely consider you"—she smiled—"in the harmless brotherly class."

"Yes," he said, looking at her with a queer expression.

"Mercy, boy!" she exclaimed, presently, "put on your shoes and stockings. It makes me cold to look at you."

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He did as directed. She glanced about her.

"Do you see my house?" he asked. "It's a portable affair—meant originally for a garage, I think. I had it put here after the water went down a week ago."

The tiny house sat amidst the clump of trees. It was an ungainly sort of thing of the same general style of architecture as the house on a Noah's ark.

"It isn't beautiful," she observed.

"No, but it's faithful. It does what is required of it."

He started off toward the house—and then came back to impart a bit of moralizing that occurred to him.

"That's the way with us human beings," he said. "In all our possessions we prefer beauty to serviceableness—even in our wives."

"You have wives?" she interrupted.

"Only in the far future," he explained. "But I know that in picking out a wife I should doubtless pick out a beautiful one—like you," he added, after some thought.

She thanked him profusely.

He completed his interrupted journey to the house and returned with an axe with which he chopped



“ HAVE YOU COME TO LIFE ? ”

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driftwood from a pile that lay close by the house, and bringing an armful, started a fire between two big stones close beside her.

"I think this promises to be gorgeous," she exclaimed. "And are we to have food? Somehow I am hungry."

"Do you know why?" he said. "It is nearly five o'clock and you haven't eaten since eight this morning."

She raised her eyebrows. "It isn't really so late?"

He assured her that it was.

"If I hadn't agreed," she said, "to turn all the responsibility of this expedition over to you, I should be worrying about what your sister will think if we aren't home in time for dinner. She expects us, doesn't she?"

"She will know that business—or something—has detained you. And they never expect me until I appear."

"At any rate," she asserted, "I should starve before I got there if we left now."

He started again toward the house.

"Let me go too," she exclaimed.

"What! Have you come to life?" he asked, laughing.

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"The prospect of food accomplishes wonders," she explained.

They found in the house a store of canned things and some potatoes, sugar, olives, coffee, jam and various and sundry non-perishable foods.

"I, am going to live here, beginning next week," he said. "I have just begun to stock up."

She looked intently over the collection, peering curiously into everything, unwrapping the corners of things that were in paper and generally being as inquisitive as a mouse. She came away bearing a package of cheese.

"Am I going to be allowed to make something out of this?" she inquired.

"If you are sure you can make a rabbit over a wood-fire."

The fire had burned up satisfactorily and they had a fine bed of glowing coals under the blazing wood. They poked the potatoes into the midst of these. The coffee-pot was precariously adjusted in a sort of canyon between two stones, where the flames leaped up and beat upon its tin sides. The rabbit progressed nicely and was given a place of honor in an aluminum frying-pan which spanned the space between the ledge on the stone and an iron bar run-

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ning across the fire, making the chance almost even as to whether the fire or they were to have the first opportunity of consuming its contents.

Dusk fell before these culinary operations were complete. The firelight fell red upon her as she bent over her golden food. Darkness came closer and made a house about them as big in diameter as the glow of the fire. Had they had time to look above them they could have seen the even sky dot slowly with faint stars, and the fat white crescent of the moon become a shining thing instead of a pale mark in the sky.

The steaming coffee-pot blew its aroma into the air, sputtering and bubbling with its own importance. The rabbit neared a state of completion, and was cleverly withdrawn from its dangerous position without catastrophe. Potatoes, blacker than coal as to outside but within white as the driven snow, were dug out of the depths of the fire. David added to the delicacy and daintiness of the meal by toasting frankfurter sausages upon the end of a sharpened stick.

They sat with their backs to the tree and the pleasant blaze in their faces and drank coffee from tin cups, while they balanced on their laps each a

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wooden plate, where rested a crisply blackened sausage, a snow white potato, seasoned with a sense of out-of-doors, which is the life of a potato incinerated thus, and a cracker supporting a little mound of gold.

And after they had fallen upon this repast with the ardor of early American Indians, there remained presently the plates and the tin cups. They leaned back against the trees and, sitting thus comfortable and warm, they surveyed the moon and the stars and the streak of milky way. In the distance shone the lights of the city, which threw their glow upon the sky. The river steamer approaching let forth three long coughs of warning from her siren whistle, and swung around in the channel, her lighted decks reflected in the water, and the eye of her search-light seeking out the wharf where she was to dock. Now and then a belated sailboat loafed homeward before the leisurely breeze, her gray sails indistinct against the night and her skipper, with the light from the binnacle on his face, sitting with an inanimate immovability at the wheel.

"This is the world I like," he said.

"It almost frightens you, doesn't it," she exclaimed, "with its immensity. I have never been out

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like this before at night. I have always been chaperoned by electric lights."

He crossed his legs comfortably and put his hands behind his head.

"We must come again—that is, if I can ever get you in this relaxing mood. You seem to be keyed up to something, usually."

"After they work me for seven hours, I am always in a relaxing mood. I shall be as clay in your hands."

"I take that as a promise," he replied.

"Oh, I am always willing to let some one else lay out my pleasures for me. And I like your methods," she added, without looking at him, "even if you are a friend of my childhood."

"I realize, of course, that I am as a prophet in his own country," he said.

He rose, and put some fresh sticks on the fire.

"Oh," he said suddenly, "shall you take the train home to-night?"

"No. I am going to stay down to a meeting of the creditors to-morrow. But I must send some mail on the train."

"We'll get back in time for that. We'll just watch these logs burn out. You haven't told me,"

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he said, "what you thought of the wood preservative."

"I didn't suppose you were interested," she replied, looking at him in surprise.

"Why not?"

"I thought you hated everything connected with business."

"No, I don't know that I do," he said, slowly.

"Then I will tell you," she began. "This preservative costs too much to manufacture."

"Then you are not in favor of purchasing the factory."

"I will not recommend it," she said, smiling.

"That was a queer character," he observed, presently, "who did the honors for you at the factory. He had a nose like an eagle."

"I didn't notice his nose."

He pulled out a letter from his pocket and finding a blank space upon it, made a little caricature of the white-bearded man at the factory. It was a likeness, and it caught the man's peculiarities. She laughed, and kept it in her hand looking at it.

"David," she exclaimed, "you mustn't give up this sort of thing. I think you have the spark in you."

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"I haven't given it up. I may take to it again yet."

"You must let me have this," she said.

He assented, and she put the sketch in the belt of her skirt.

"And now," he asserted, "the logs appear to have burned out."

They carried their dishes to the water's edge, and hastily washed them. After this they straightened the things in the little house, locked the door and were ready to depart.

"How is it the island dried off so quickly," she asked, "after having been submerged for a week?"

"On account of the sandy soil, I suppose. It's a great convenience, isn't it?"

They went down to the water's edge, and there, either because she felt more energetic or because she had developed a shyness of him, she refused to be carried, and, slipping off her shoes and stockings, waded into the water, crying out and laughing at the coldness of it as she went deeper in, but keeping on until she reached the launch and clambered up the little ladder to the deck.

"You oughtn't to have done that," he told her. "You may catch cold. I could have carried you."

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"I didn't want you to carry me."

He started the engine.

"Go into the cabin," he directed, brusquely, "and get warm by the machine, and be sure not to come out again until you are warm."

"Yes, sir," she replied, and disappeared meekly within.

He ran straight for the city. She came out presently.

"Now I'm warm. Feel my hand. That's the way they tell whether children are warm."

"It feels warm, certainly."

"Then I suppose you will allow me to stay on deck."

She leaned on the cabin and gazed ahead of her at the city.

"I suppose it helps you to steer to have me right in your way."

"I can see well enough. I like to look at you, anyway."

"I'll come closer then."

She sat down beside the wheel and watched him in silence as he made the landing. A man came out and made the launch fast. David arose and helped her ashore.

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"Now it's all over," she said.

"All over."

They were walking down the wharf.

"Oh, my bottle," she cried, and went back to rescue her sample of imitation turpentine.

"I want to go to the post-office and write letters," she said.

She stopped at a little stationery store and bought a round box to fit her bottle. At the post-office she put the bottle in the box and addressed it to Evans, in the hope that he would get it at his home before he left for the office. Then she wrote him a letter and asked him to stay away from his office if necessary and find out how near the sample came to having all the properties of turpentine, and to let her know by telegraph at Mr. Sawyer's office what his conclusions were. She explained where she had found it and what it had been made from. Finally she wrote a note to Mr. Bundy saying she would be a day late in returning. She put special delivery stamps on the parcel and the letters and made sure that they would go off on the night train.

"Now we must hurry home and make our peace with the Sawyers," she said.

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They boarded a street-car and made haste for the first time since two o'clock in the afternoon. They found both the Sawyers in the living-room of the house.

"Here they are," exclaimed Elsie. "I said that since you were with David, we might expect you when we saw you. John was for ordering out the fire department."

"We spent a long day across the river," David explained.

"But Venn said you left there before three o'clock," Mr. Sawyer asserted.

"Well, Margaret had to recuperate, and there were letters to be written."

Mr. Sawyer looked at her with interest.

"I hope they were letters urging Bundy and Son to buy the factory."

"I am afraid not."

"Oh, well," he asserted, confidently, "we'll convince you to-morrow."

It was past eleven when they showed Margaret to her room. David, who observed no regular bed hour, stayed down-stairs to read. He looked up from his book presently and was surprised to find her standing before him.

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"You have my pocketbook in your pocket, which has the key to my bag in it," she said.

He gave it to her. She held out her hand.

"Good-night," she said, in a low tone.

He took—not the one hand—but both, in both of his.

"Good-night," he said, his eyes upon hers.

She met his glance smiling. Then she gently withdrew her hands. A great warm tide surged up in her heart, and the blood ran fast in her veins. She dropped her eyes in confusion and stood for a moment wondering that the calm lady of Severn Street should be so stirred at the touch of a man's hands.

CHAPTER XV

DAVID—AND NO GOLIATH

AS Margaret lay still in her room looking at the moonlight coming in through the windows, it occurred to her that this had been an unusual day—a day in which she had given up—at least in part—to play instead of work. She had seldom given herself up so wholly to relaxation. As a child she had not understood the meaning of real play. Her recreation had been in grown-up occupations. Shelling peas for her had been a diversion, and the privilege of setting the table a great excitement. Her childhood had been one of responsibility, which is to say that she had never had a childhood. The care-free days had not existed for her.

It came almost as a revelation to her that there was another side of her nature. She had grown to look on herself as a person whose work was to sit at a desk and take responsibility, and whose recreation was in seeing the fruits of her work. Her vocation was all-sufficient for her. It infused in her

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the same enthusiasm that a painter or a sculptor would have had in his work. And she was an artist, in that she strove toward an ideal. The results of her work were the things of her heart and hand; and she was willing and eager to believe that this was her life.

She was beginning to realize vaguely that there was embedded somewhere deeper in her another force—a force that could induce in her an entirely new interest—which had nothing at all to do with work and ambition. She could not have explained what the force was nor what it meant, but it seemed to her like a high explosive, lying quiet beneath the surface and awaiting only an unknown contact to make it an active, an irresistible power.

She expressed something of this to Elsie Sawyer in the morning as she sat in the nursery and watched the latter dressing her youngest child. The older child, a bright cheeked boy with flaxen hair, came into the room, and his mother put him into the crib and covered him completely with the covers. As soon as he poked his head, turtle-wise, out of the enveloping mass of blankets, she covered him up again. This simple game was received with shrieks of approval.

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"Now no one ever did that to me when I was a child," Margaret said, when the boy had been sent down to his breakfast.

"Children miss a great deal," the other replied, "by not having some one to understand them. There is nothing more pathetic, really, than a child. It has ambitions just as grown-ups have ; and has a reason for everything it wants to do. But they are held down by rigid rule. Some one else says what they shall and shall not do. And the spirit of the child is spoiled just as the person who dictates that rule tempers it or does not temper it with affection. Affection and companionship are what they need."

"That is what I should have had," said Margaret. "If it is ever my portion to have children," she went on, "I trust that Providence will never let me forget to give them all that I did not have."

Elsie industriously brushed the infant's hair.

"If you hold to those sentiments," she said, at length, "it means that when you marry you will have to give up your business, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"Wouldn't that be a great sacrifice? John made inquiries about you yesterday, and found out if it hadn't been for you Bundy and Son would have

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come very near to going to pieces. In fact, he said, 'she is Bundy and Son.' "

Margaret flushed with pleasure.

"Wouldn't it be a great sacrifice?" persisted the other.

"Why, no. That is, I can't conceive myself giving up my work unless something else had got under my skin and made me want to do that more."

The child, its hair finally arranged to the satisfaction of the mother, came shyly over to Margaret and slipped a tiny smooth hand into hers as it lay in her lap. The baby hand, half as large as it would be one day, but perfectly formed as if it might have been a small-scale model for the real full-grown thing, was warm and soft—soft with a certain living gentleness. The spirit and soul of the baby seemed to be in the touch of her fingers. A thrill of pleasure ran through Margaret. She bent over and held her lips to the tiny square inch of palm in the tiny hand. The physical touch of it was like wine to her soul. She drew the child to her, and looked up at Elsie flushed and embarrassed by an unexpected shyness.

"Treasures in Heaven," she said. "And I have been laying them up on earth."

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She rose and went down-stairs with the child, pausing to let both tiny feet rest on each step. Some one was playing the piano.

"Hark! Uncle David make moosic."

Margaret looked through the banisters into the library beyond. David was sitting before the piano, oblivious to everything about him. She stopped to listen. She knew that he played by ear alone, and that his power to conjure melody out of the keys was due to a mere surprising proficiency with his fingers, and a mere natural musical voice within him. It was not the melody, however, that caused her to stop, nor any power of hers to know and to appraise the music that floated out to her. It was the feeling that there was a current carrying through it down to David himself. It was his own voice and in it she saw the warmth and color of his own spirit.

As, led by the halting steps beside her, she slowly descended the stair, she was thinking that David must always be expressing that spirit—no matter what the medium. In fact, he was always ready to take up any new means of expression, smothering progress by reason of his very proficiency in obtaining a quick working knowledge of each new trick and craft. As a boy he had always been under the

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spell of some transient enthusiasm ; sometimes for carving grotesque manikins out of sticks of chalk ; sometimes for writing verse, preferably triolets and rondeaus, whose form was pleasantly intricate ; sometimes for making models of houses out of cardboard—she remembered still the gardens around them with paths made of strips of sandpaper and trees made of sponges dipped in green water-color, and set upon wooden sticks for trunks ; sometimes for drawing likenesses of people, in the throes of which obsession he would return home from school in the afternoon and draw pictures of the new faces he had seen during the day.

But although few of these enthusiasms lasted long, yet she had come to see that there was less fickleness in David Bruce than he was charged with. He had the unaccredited constancy of a butterfly flitting from flower to flower—apparently aimless, but gathering constantly. Some men who knew him—the square-jawed and hard-eyed men who hunted the dollar to its last hiding place, viewed him with a smiling and half-contemptuous tolerance, because he did not follow, nose down, the trail of the hundred pennies. They felt that they were broad-minded, and felt so, strangely enough, because they had

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narrowed their vision down to one thing. Blazoned on their 'scutcheon was the word "Accumulation," and that was their standard of success. But to David the piling up of money fulfilled no ambition. He had seen his square-jawed friends warping the once straight timbers of their souls—sometimes ever so slightly, sometimes across great spaces—to meet the irregular requirements of their business. But he had the idea that he was put in the world to accomplish some particular thing—something he would be paid for, as a matter of course, to provide for his sustenance—but it was the accomplishment, and not the pay, that was the paramount thing. And he was hunting for the thing he was to accomplish—the right thing. The fickle part about him was that it took him a long while to find it. The steadfast part was that he persisted in hunting.

The youthful feet of the child piloted Margaret into the dining-room. John Sawyer greeted her.

"I want you to promise not to leave the house with this irresponsible David," he said. "You must be at the meeting at one o'clock."

"No danger," said Elsie, by way of reassuring her husband. "David has condescended to make an appointment with Mrs. Harris at ten o'clock."

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"She ambushed me on the street," David said, strolling into the room, "and I told her that ten o'clock to-day would suit me as well as any time—and I suppose that's true," he added.

"I hope you intend to keep the appointment," his sister observed, seriously.

"Now that she has succeeded in getting the child-labor bill through the legislature," he returned, "she wants her portrait painted with a copy of the act in her hand and the State Capitol in the background."

"I don't see why you are so superior about it," Sawyer exclaimed. "You are being paid for it. I would paint her with one foot on the moon and the other on the aurora borealis if she wanted it. I can't understand your point of view."

"We all realize that, John," observed David, whacking his egg.

After breakfast Margaret announced that she was going to the post-office. She had asked Mr. Bundy to write to her if necessary, in care of general delivery.

"I will go with you," said David, "if I may."

"You must not forget your appointment with Mrs. Harris," observed his sister.

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"I shall certainly bear it in mind. Such impending calamities are not easily forgotten."

They descended the steps to the street. David glanced about him.

"Can you run?" he demanded, suddenly.

She turned to him in surprise.

"Why?" she was about to ask. But the street was deserted except for a closed automobile in the distance. She laughed and said instead "Yes."

"Come on, then."

They dashed down the sidewalk. He turned suddenly at the first intersecting street.

"Let's hide here," he said.

"David, are you insane?"

He did not reply, but peered cautiously around the corner.

"Now you look," he suggested, at length, relinquishing his place of vantage.

She did not understand, but she looked. The street was still empty except for the automobile she had seen in the distance. It had stopped before the Sawyer house, and a large round lady had alighted and was ascending the front steps.

"It's Mrs. Harris," he explained, gleefully. "The

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mountain—if it isn't disrespectful to refer to her as that—has come to Mohammed."

"David, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, severely. Nevertheless, she laughed.

"Aren't you going back?" she asked.

"No."

She looked at him for a moment. Then she shrugged her shoulders, and they walked on.

It was a dull morning. There was the chill of rain in the air, and the sky hung low and leaden. The cool wind, fresh with its breath of ozone, wore about the street corners with a moan as of ocean waves.

"This is a beautiful day," he asserted.

"Serious?"

"Quite serious."

"I thought it was just a trifle damp and dismal," she confessed.

"When you have finished general-delivering, come down to the water-front and I will show you what I mean."

There was no mail for her.

"I am ready to be shown," she said.

They walked to the river-front. By the steam-boat wharf lay the trim bay steamer, her black-banded yellow stack showing from afar off. Deck

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hands were washing her down with a hose. This was the boat that ran to Baltimore and was the pride of Bay City, as it was a concrete testimonial to the rise in importance of the little metropolis.

From the end of the next pier they could see across the broad waters of the two rivers—a gray expanse of tossing waves breaking into whitecaps here and there as far as they could see. Through the gathering mist they could just distinguish the dark line of the far shore. Indistinctly, as upon a partly developed photograph plate, stood the distant trees of David's island, seeming to grow out of the water itself. Far out, moving steadily along, a tug, all gray through the mist, stirred up at her forefoot a scud of foam and from her funnels smutted the sky with a line of black smoke.

A fine rain began to fall. It felt pleasant upon their faces. She knew that it was not beneficial for a certain color in her hat, but she did not suggest leaving. Immediately opposite them two men were pulling on the halyards of the mainsail of a dingy sloop. The ungainly canvas rose slowly to the shrill accompaniment of the pulley aloft until it was taut at the mast side and the gaff hung down like a bird's broken wing, but a few heaves at the peak of

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it brought the sail up smooth and tight, a puff of wind caught it and bellied it out, the anchor came up to the creaking of the windlass and the boat began to move smoothly through the water.

"I should like to be aboard it," she said.

"So should I—although she is probably fragrant of fish. But our own launch is good enough, isn't it?"

She looked at him with interest.

"I'm willing," she said, at length.

They turned back and walked shoreward in the increasing rain. Their launch rocked at its mooring by the slip.

They put on oilskins that were in the lockers in the cabin. She looked like an emblem of the sea in the yellow slicker that enveloped her down to her feet, and the yellow sou'wester tied under her chin. He showed her how to start the engine. Following his directions she grasped the wheel and brought it up as hard as she could against the pressure. It turned all the way over, the staccato explosions of the engine echoed against the wharves, and the launch went put-put-put out into the rain.

All around now was a wall of gentle, drizzling rain. The wharves and the boats moored beside

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them were dim and indistinct. The water was stippled with rain. The further shore was lost behind the mist.

They were cold with the water that drove into their faces as they plunged ahead. Water ran off the little rubber epaulettes on their shoulders. Everything they touched was comfortably damp. Water dripped from the roof of the cabin and splashed into the river. She looked up at him, her eyes bright with excitement.

"I have been watching you steer so long," she said, "I think I should like to try it myself."

He relinquished the wheel to her. It gave her a fine sense of power to turn the spokes and make the bow swing round as she wished. She steered out into the open and left the wharves but a mere shadow astern. They ran on through the rain. What there was of sky or heavens appeared to be but a few feet above their heads. The water was visible for a hundred yards or more and then merged into the rain. They were running ahead carrying their sky and horizon with them.

Suddenly a shadow dead ahead came into focus, and a tugboat, looking impossibly large and hurrying through the water so that she seemed to be

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pushing a great wave before her, bore down upon them. Her whistle blew twice.

"Pass her on this side," said David.

He did not reach a hand out to touch the wheel. She threw the spokes over. They passed the tug close by—so close that they could read the name on the pilot house and hear the roar of her engines. Then the huge wake caught them and the little launch pranced on the rollers like a mettlesome horse.

"Aren't you proud of me?" she asked, smiling.

"Immeasurably," he replied, seriously.

She shot a glance at him and laughed.

"Shall we turn about now?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Haven't you an appointment?"

"I believe I will not keep it."

She gazed into the binnacle, where she was trying to keep the compass needle due west—not an easy task if one is not accustomed to it.

"David," she observed, "what you need is a Goliath—something big to aim at. I wish you would hurry and get it."

"I can't paint her," he said, "so what is the use of seeing her? Besides, I can see her any time at all, if I want to, but you I can see only now."

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"You can see me at any time," she told him.

"But you will be a long way off."

"You seem to have managed to live for several years a long way off from me—without inconvenience," she said.

They passed close by the lighthouse, rising out of the water on its iron stilts.

"If we kept right on our course," he said, looking at the compass, "we should bump into the island. It is almost due east of the lighthouse."

"I wonder if I could hit it," she asked, "steering by compass?"

"Go ahead," he said. "Keep a little to the south, on account of the current."

The lighthouse faded into the rain behind them. It was as if some one had placed an opaque globe over them which moved along as they moved. They were playing a miniature game of sailing from one continent to another with a miniature horizon strung close around them, with land close by, but not within sight as far as the eye could see.

She leaned forward and wiped the rain off the glass of the binnacle.

"David," she observed, presently, "what you need in your life is a device like this to show you

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which way you are headed. You sail around with all the energy in the world, but you don't know where you are going."

He gazed thoughtfully ahead of him.

"I believe," he said, "I know where such a means of enlightenment is procurable."

"Get it quickly," she advised him.

"I shall endeavor to."

He looked at her for a moment with an unexplained smile on his lips. She met his eyes.

"I don't see what you are laughing at," she exclaimed.

Nevertheless she continued to look at him. Then the corners of her mouth began to lift a little.

"David," she observed, "you're the silliest person."

The boat ran on through the rain. The gray wall of mist before them was still unbroken by any sign of shore.

"Of course you couldn't blame me," he remarked at length, apropos of nothing, "for taking your advice."

She laughed in spite of herself.

"I am sure I don't know what you are talking about," she said. But a new and pleasant excite-

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ment stirred in her. Was it the consciousness of pursuit?

And then faintly upon that gray wall came the shadowy outline of something, and almost on the instant they were running beside the island, with the trees and the little house, showing vaguely through the rain. She turned the bow of the boat away from it.

"Good-bye, island," she said. "Some day, perhaps, I shall stay longer."

The launch made a wide sweep and headed again for the city.

"How shall you get to and from your island and the shore?" she asked, idly.

"I shall have a canoe. The launch is too luxurious for me."

"Perhaps you will take me across in a canoe some day," she said lightly. "I should like that."

"I am only waiting for the chance."

But even then he was wondering whether he would ever live on his island at all.

"Hold out your foot, please," he said, presently.

She looked at him in surprise and then held out her foot.

"It's very wet," he asserted. "Sailors ought not

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to wear low shoes. You had better go down by the engine and dry off."

With a show of meekness—quite unconvincing—she obeyed. He closed the hatch after her. The rain had now simmered down to a mere fog-like mist. A stiff breeze had sprung up from the south, which presently blew a hole in the curtain of the sky low at the horizon, and through the long narrow rent peered the light of day. The mist lifted and showed the city fresh and smiling like a child after a storm of tears. When Margaret came out of the cabin again, the sun had broken through and a segment of rainbow rested on the storm-cloud across the water, the foot of it growing out of the ground near the stone barn where they had been the day before to see the wood preservative.

"See," he said, "an omen of good luck. There is a pot of gold there."

It was past noon when they stepped out on the slip from the launch. She drew on her gloves.

"Yesterday and this morning," she observed, "you have shown me your life, so to speak. Now I am going to show you mine."

He walked beside her wonderingly. They made their way into the business district. She hesitated

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for a moment at the corner of two bustling thoroughfares.

"This way," she said, turning to her right.

They continued down the street for nearly a block.

"Ah," she observed, stopping suddenly, "here it is. I thought it would be about in this location."

She pushed open the glass doors of the place. It was a lunch room—an energy distributor for the business world around it. The floors were of white ceramic tile. The walls were wainscoted with a sort of clear white imitation marble with a surface like glass. The table tops were of the same material. The whiteness of it gave an air of spotlessness to everything.

"If they make it look clean," she said to him, glancing about among the crowd of people, "it doesn't matter much what it really is."

They asserted squatter rights over a table by the simple expedient of tilting chairs against it. From a counter at the end of the room they chose by guess what they wanted to eat and bore it back to their lair.

"You have read in the Bible somewhere," she said, laughing, "about the soldiers who passed by the water's edge. Some lay down to drink and were

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caught by the enemy and slain, but others simply scooped up water in their hands as they walked by and were saved. This is the place where you scoop up food as you walk by, and are saved."

He nodded. "You use these places," he said, presently, "because they are quick. I use them frequently because they are cheap."

"It wasn't quite fair of me to make you come," she replied. "But for the last twenty-four hours my life has been so—so—well, happy—that I needed something rough like this to bring me to earth once more."

They were soon out on the street again.

"I am sorry I have to let you go," he said, smiling.

"Sorry myself," she replied.

They entered the foyer of an office building and stood before the elevator cage. He held out his hand.

"My father once said that you were the Producer and I the Waster," he told her. "I feel now as if that were true."

"Don't think that way," she advised.

She touched his coat just over his heart.

"It all depends," she said, "on just what is in there."

CHAPTER XVI

THE RAINBOW

THE first thing she did upon entering Mr. Sawyer's office was to inquire if there were a letter or a telegram for her. There was none. It was not yet one o'clock, and Mr. Sawyer had not returned from his luncheon. She was shown into his private office, which looked out over the water. She amused herself by picking out the places she had visited in the launch. Sawyer himself came in very soon.

"Miss Margaret," he exclaimed, as she turned to greet him, "that's the place, over there."

He pointed to the gable of the stone barn across the river.

"It's not for me," she replied.

"Please don't talk like that," he remonstrated. "Now listen to me. Of all the firms who are caught in this, Bundy and Son are the only purveyors of paint. The rest of us all sell something else. We could no more handle paint than Bundy and Son

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could sell jewelry. Don't you see? You are our only hope.

"And, of course," he went on, "anything that helps toward an easy settlement of the trouble helps you as well as the rest of us."

Margaret made some indeterminate reply. Sawyer did not press the point.

At the meeting there were six creditors besides Margaret and Mr. Sawyer. She fixed their names in her mind and endeavored to classify them. Three were of the usual trade-seeking type she was accustomed to, the type who made the selling of goods a personal matter and accompanied their business dealings with a warm hand-shake and a manner hail-fellow-well-met. The others were of no stereotyped class. One, a tall, spare man with a red beard, sat near her and talked all the time without apparently producing any ideas. Another, across the room, balanced one of John Sawyer's mahogany chairs deftly against the wall on its two rearmost legs, poised as though ready for immediate action—a bald-headed little gentleman, encased in a white vest—whose sunny smile endeavored to cast an air of sociability over the occasion—without avail. For beside him, stolidly erect, sat the remaining creditor,

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a rotund, dignified gentleman, whose countenance, solemn and sincerely writ with the consciousness of his own wisdom, seemed to insist upon the seriousness of the business at hand.

After some preliminary discussion, John Sawyer rose.

"I wish to say," he announced, "that I have seen Groh and that he is willing to give up his interest and claim in the factory for the sum of one thousand dollars."

There was a pause.

"Suppose we don't give it to him," said the man with the red beard, in a moment.

"He'd go into bankruptcy," Sawyer replied. "Having all his debts canceled has no terrors for him."

"We don't want him to do that," asserted the man.

"Amen," remarked the bald-headed gentleman from his point of vantage on the tilted chair.

"Then the question arises—who will take over the factory?"

There was an expressive silence.

"No undignified rush, anyway," observed the red beard.

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The rotund solemn person rose and pulled down his vest. He cleared his throat. There was a most important air about him.

"It seems to me," he announced portentously, "that we should first discover which of the creditors—here present—is engaged in the paint business and is therefore capable of handling this—er—preservative."

He looked about him inquiringly as if to see whether every one had absorbed this idea, and slowly sat down again. Margaret said nothing.

"Well, who are the guilty ones?" demanded the red-bearded person, who sold hardware himself.

"My ears are burning," said Margaret, quietly. "I am in the paint business."

The bald-headed man lowered his chair down upon its four legs.

"That settles it," he observed. "Let's adjourn."

"But," she said, "I would not recommend to Bundy and Son that they assume the responsibility of this factory. The wood preservative costs too much to make."

"How do you know that?" demanded the fat person, in his resonant voice.

She read them some figures. These were the

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figures she had obtained the day before, which showed that the cost of manufacturing the preservative was nearly as much as the price for which it could be sold. They viewed her with added respect.

"No wonder Groh could not make money," said the bald-headed man.

This development of the situation threw all their calculations out of gear. Sawyer rose.

"Under the circumstances," he asserted, "it would of course be unreasonable for us to expect Bundy and Son to take over the factory. The question then arises—what shall we do?"

A long wrangle followed. Many suggestions were received and discarded, and the discussion ran on with hopeless indefiniteness. The little clock on the desk struck three, and there was not even the first loose thread showing out of the tangle. A stenographer came in and said something in a low tone to Mr. Sawyer.

"Why, yes, she is here," he replied. "Bring it in."

The girl left the room and returned presently with a telegram and a little book, both of which she handed to Margaret.

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"Will you sign there, please?" she requested, "and there is thirty-seven cents due."

Margaret suppressed her excitement and signed. She handed the book and the money to the girl. All the discussion had stopped while this was going on. Not wishing to open the telegram with all eyes upon her, she let it lie in her lap. The talk, after a moment's embarrassed hesitation, went on again. She presently opened the envelope. The message was from Evans and said :

"Get turpentine rights if possibly can. Is an absolute substitute."

Her hands closed tightly on the sheet of yellow paper, and a hot coal of excitement burned in her breast. Her heart beat heavily within her, and the odd thought came into her head that it was the knocking of Opportunity.

She knew that Evans would not have urged action if he had not been convinced. The fact that he had used more than the regulation ten words was even an indication of enthusiasm. She scarcely heard the rumble of talk around her. Why should she? The question was settled now.

She had a thousand dollars in her own right. It was in a government bond, and she knew that

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John Sawyer would endorse her note for that amount on the strength of it. She would pay a thousand dollars for the factory and all that it contained; and she was certain that the stock on hand of the wood preservative could be sold at retail by Bundy and Son so that she could get almost all her thousand dollars back. Then she would have the rights to the turpentine at no cost at all. And to realize the value of those rights she had but to think of the Waring Company, which had once been on the verge of bankruptcy by reason solely of the increasing price of turpentine.

She felt that there was not a man in the room whose eye was not upon her. The galvanic current set up by the telegram seemed to have gone all the way round.

"I think," she said, "that it is within my power to end this discussion."

There was an eloquent hush.

"I have just received unexpected news," she began, "which will enable me to reconsider the decision I made a while ago about the factory."

"Ah, ha," murmured the rotund gentleman, which exclamation coming from his deep chest assumed the proportions of a wise statement.

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"I will be perfectly frank with you in stating that it is not the wood preservative that tempts me," she explained. "I want to know therefore whether this thousand dollars purchases the rights to everything they manufacture at the factory."

Astonishment was registered on every face.

"Why, that is the only thing they do manufacture," asserted the red-bearded man.

A murmur of assent seconded this.

"They do manufacture a few incidental things," corrected Sawyer, at length, wonderingly. "I will call up Groh and ask him about it."

He seemed to be somewhat dazed by the new turn of affairs. But he said nothing further. He took the receiver off the hook. The little group waited expectantly. There followed a one-sided talk.

"Groh says," announced Sawyer at length, hanging up the receiver again, "that he is willing to turn over the rights of everything that is manufactured there to the person who pays him the thousand dollars."

Margaret drew a long breath.

"Then you had better have him come right over here," she replied.

Sawyer did this and summoned his attorney, who

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understood the case. A contract was drawn, was rewritten entirely before it satisfied every one, and finally duly signed and witnessed.

"But," observed the rotund gentleman, in surprise, after reading the contract, "the party buying the rights is not Bundy and Son at all."

"No," replied the party of the first part, "it's Margaret York."

In front of the elevator upon a marble bench reading a magazine sat David Bruce. He had been waiting since half-past three and it was now half-past four. But he decided that he could wait just as long as the meeting up-stairs in his brother-in-law's office could continue to meet.

At ten minutes of five an elevator descended. The door slid back. A stream of people filed out and next to the last person was Margaret herself. She came over to him immediately, almost as if she might have expected to see him there. Her eyes were shining with excitement.

"Is it all over?" he demanded.

"David," she cried, "the rainbow was right. I have something that is going to earn me thousands and thousands of dollars."

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He broke into a smile.

"Congratulations," he cried, and took her hand in both of his. And then the smile disappeared.

"But I'm sorry," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNSENTIMENTAL MR. POTTER

THAT night she took the train home. At the station, old Venn from the factory over the river was waiting for her, much perturbed over his change of employers. She told him that as soon as she had had a talk with Mr. Bundy about disposing of the wood preservative on hand, she would discuss with Venn their plan of action; but she did not say what that was to be. He let fall the information that one of the men from the Waring Company had looked over the plant that day. Margaret smiled. Potter was evidently keeping his eye on Felix Groh.

"Did he ask about your turpentine?" she inquired, curiously.

"Yes, but he didn't seem interested. Come to think of it," he corrected, "he *did* ask what the process was—though he did it in an offhand way."

"Did you tell him?"

"No."

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When she arrived at her office the following day, she found a large amount of work piled up on her desk. This kept her very busy, so that it was well along in the afternoon before she had an opportunity to discuss her trip with Mr. Bundy. She found that he had become more and more dismal all the time that she had been away and had come to the conclusion that he was quite certain to lose all his seven hundred dollars. He was greatly relieved, therefore, at the settlement of the affair, and seemed to share the optimism of every one that the little German would soon be on his feet again.

Margaret's own venture took his breath away, as any move in a new direction always did. His mind never quite keyed itself up to the point where he understood how a person could enter upon a scheme whose certainty was not guaranteed beforehand. But at the same time he felt rather relieved that it was not he himself who was involved in it.

He was tremendously interested, however, in assisting her in disposing of the wood preservative. He fell in with her scheme to have Bundy and Son sell it for her. And so anxious was he that she should not lose money on what he considered the precarious undertaking she had embarked upon

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that he insisted the firm should take no profit on the sale.

When the little brass clock in the office pointed to a quarter before five, she was quite thoroughly tired and was glad the day was nearly over. The firing-line was a stimulating place, but when the sun went down on the day's work she was usually glad. She had her hat on ready to go when she was called to the telephone. Mr. Potter's voice answered her.

"I did not know whether I should find you back or not," he said.

"How did you know I had gone?"

"You will soon learn," he explained, "that you captains of industry cannot move about unobserved.

"Would it be convenient," he went on, "to have a person like me call upon you to-night?"

Her first impulse was to say that she was too tired, but then it occurred to her that there were several questions upon which she might want to ask his advice. So she told him that it would be perfectly convenient.

When she entered the little house of Miss Garnet, she found that lady already there.

"I missed you greatly," she cried. "It seems as

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though you have been gone a month. We are going to have a regular old-fashioned comfortable evening together."

"Mr. Potter is coming to share it with us," observed Margaret, smiling.

Miss Garnet held up her hands.

"I withdraw," she announced. "Do you know," she went on, "Willis Potter used to be almost a beau of mine before you came along. Now he's so crazy about you he can't see."

"Is that in keeping with Mr. Potter's character?" Margaret queried.

"Well," replied the other, "when I met him down town day before yesterday, he asked immediately about you and when I told him you were away, nothing would satisfy him but that he must be told where you were, when you were coming back and all about it. And when a busy man like him takes that much interest and insists on coming to see you the minute you come home, it looks suspicious."

"I will keep you informed of developments."

"You could go far," observed her companion, "and fare worse. He makes about thirty thousand a year. And a man who earns that is not to be sneezed at."

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"I have never sneezed at him," replied Margaret.

When Mr. Potter arrived, no amount of manoeuvring and diplomacy could keep Miss Garnet in the room. She eluded them presently and left them alone together before the fire. In the abstract, this was a most romantic way to leave them, and Margaret might possibly have felt the force of the situation had she not been turning over in her mind the advisability of discussing with him the possibilities of her turpentine substitute. She felt that she would sooner or later go to him for advice, for she had absolute confidence in his ability to put his finger on the essentials of any business problem. But nevertheless she had a feeling that there was plenty of time. As to the romantic aspect of the scene, there was nothing in his demeanor, apparently, to give color to it. He gave the impression of being warm and comfortable in the glow of the fire.

"Did you have a successful trip?" he asked—which was surely not a romantic question.

"Glorious."

He looked at her keenly.

"Now that you have had a taste of business," he asked, "how do you like it?"

"I'm full of enthusiasm every minute for it."

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"There is a great fascination about it," he asserted, seriously. "It is a big game that you have to keep on playing all the time. It wraps itself around your life. You can't stop playing for one minute, lest in that minute you lose ground and the rest of them come down on you like a pack of wolves."

"I haven't come across anything as desperate as that yet."

"You will as you push up toward the top. And you will go to the top. You have the punch—which is a humble way of saying you are thinking just a little bit better and a little bit truer than the next man. Are you going through to the end?" he asked, abruptly. "Or is there a shelter by the way-side?"

"A shelter by the wayside?"

"Perhaps you will marry in the midst of things," he explained, "and leave the procession."

"I have no such idea at present," she said.

"I am relieved to hear it."

"You wish me to be a spinster all my life?" she asked, smiling.

"No," he replied. "No. I believe that would be an error. But I also think it would be a great pity

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to marry if you married a person who would interrupt your career."

"I think so too," she observed.

That was all they said on that subject. In thinking over the situation later, she remembered that there had been no word more romantic nor sentimental than that. And yet when he rose to go he took both her hands. It was a strong, firm clasp—the clasp of a strong, big man. Even surprising as it was, it seemed in keeping with the capability of him that he had let nothing show until it was the exact time to tell about it.

"Miss Margaret," he said, looking at her so firmly that her own glance dropped before him, "I am not a man of polished words and beautiful sentences. When I have anything to say I say it in the first words that come to my tongue. I spoke to you this evening about the possibility of your marrying. And I spoke of that with a purpose."

He paused. She made an effort to withdraw her hands, but he held them, with the same firm and continued clasp—she could not help thinking—in which she had seen him grip the hand of an important business associate. So she let her hands rest there.

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"I have seen no woman," he went on, "who has impressed me as being so mentally acute, so intelligent, so quick of decision and so—so beautiful as yourself—and I have seen thousands of women. You supply in me a need that I have always felt. You are necessary to me."

This time she withdrew her hands and sank into a chair, bewildered and astonished.

"I should not want any marriage," he said, "to interfere with your work, and I should see to it that if you married me your career would not be spoiled. In fact," he exclaimed, with a nearer approach to enthusiasm than he had reached before, "I have been turning over in my mind the possibility of hitting upon some scheme by which we could form a business partnership as well as a—a personal one."

"I do not ask you for an answer to this proposition to-night," he said, feeling that the most advantageous plan was to press his plan gently. "It is not a matter to be decided quickly. Developments will come, things will happen, objections of to-day will pass away to-morrow. And remember this is an important affair for me and, I feel, important also for you."

She roused herself and tried to think what she

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could say. She had a far-reaching admiration for him—but she did not love him, and she did not believe that she would love him, although she knew that no one could be certain of such a thing. If he had been sentimental and pleading, as she imagined most men would have been, she could have comforted him. But he was so reserved and—well, so concise that the idea of comfort was absurd. She had either to answer him “Yes” or “No” or by promise of action at some future date. And he seemed to want to defer the answer “No.” So she said nothing.

He knew to a certain degree what was in her mind. So he held out his hand.

“No answer now,” he announced. “Good-night.”

She rose and took the hand, looking squarely in his eyes.

“Good-night,” she said.

And when he had closed the door behind him, she continued to gaze at it, fascinated and still surprised.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE YORK-POTTER COMPANY

AS the clock was striking eight, Margaret entered her office. This was an hour earlier than usual, but she had an appointment with Evans, of the Waring Company, who must be at work by nine. Evans was already there.

"How would you like," she demanded, as she took off her hat, "to go down to Bay City and run my—my turpentine factory?" She smiled at the important sound of this. "The old fellow who is there is too dreamy. With him in charge it would be impossible to make money."

"I'll go in a minute," replied Evans, unhesitatingly, "on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you allow me to manufacture my own new product there as well."

She considered the matter a moment.

"All right," she said. "I don't know what your product is, but if you buy your material and pay for your share of the labor, I have no objection to it."

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"Then I will go."

"Good."

She hung up her hat and coat in the closet of the inner room.

"What is your product?" she asked, returning.

"Miss York," he announced, "I am one step ahead of the Waring Company at last. They see what is coming and are endeavoring to meet new conditions, but I have met them already."

"How?"

"You know, of course," he replied, "that there are styles in paint just as surely as there are styles in women's hats. The wave that the Waring Company came in on was the craze for stained wood-work. But people now are beginning to go back to paint. Enamel paint finish is the proper thing, and the craze for it is spreading like a disease."

He had two small packages in his hand. One of these he unwrapped, exhibiting a piece of painted wood so carefully finished that it looked like a piece of ivory. She ran her fingers over its surface, and no rubbed marble could have been smoother.

"That has eight coats of paint on it," he said. "Each coat has been sandpapered smooth, and the last coat has been rubbed with pumice stone. Miss

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Garnet will tell you that that is the regular specification for this kind of work. It is most expensive."

"Naturally," she commented.

He unwrapped the other package. It was a similar piece of wood.

"This is a sample of my new paint. Only two coats are necessary. It is put on hot and dries off as smooth as the icing on the top of a cake. Compare them."

She saw no difference.

"I will make my fortune on it," he cried.

"I have no objection to your manufacturing it," she said, "but remember this. While you are down there, my work comes first. If you make good on that, I don't care what else you do. If you don't, the arrangement will be canceled."

"Then we are to consider it settled?" he asked.

"There is one other thing," she responded. "Mr. Potter has been a very good friend of ours. I feel that I must say a word to him about it. If he is willing to give you up in order that you may better yourself, we can consider the arrangement as settled. If, however, he feels that they need your services, I shouldn't feel justified in stealing you from him."

"All right," said Evans, "but I hardly think he

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will be broken-hearted. He told me the other day that unless I produced something for them soon, I would have to go."

"Well, that will make it easier, of course."

Later in the morning she called up Potter and told him that she had a position open for Evans which would give him more chance, and asked if Potter had any objections. She did not explain where the position was, although she knew he would realize it was not with Bundy and Son.

"I have no objections whatever," said he. "Just a moment, Miss York." There was a pause as though he were looking for something. "I have here," he went on, "a letter giving me some information about a subject upon which I would like to confer with you. Could you—ah—lunch with me to-day?"

"Why, yes," she replied.

"I will come for you at one, if that is convenient," he said.

That was convenient, and at one o'clock his car stopped before Bundy and Son's. She was curious to know what he would talk about. She was quite certain that it was not a personal matter, as he never allowed anything but business to crowd into his day.

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"I am so glad you wore that suit," he said.

Usually he was so absorbed in his work that it came as a surprise when he noted the existence of any personal charm in her. She laughed.

"I hope I shall do you credit," she replied.

She had noted many times that one of the phases of his interest in her was a pride in being seen with her. It flattered him to have people look approvingly at her when they entered a public place together. It therefore did not surprise her when they drove up to a very fashionable restaurant. She was always entertained at the bluff, cavalier manner with which he entered such a place. His bearing and the air of thorough sophistication he could assume commanded respect down to the last 'bus boy. He took pride in knowing what the best to be had consisted of, and saw to it that he got nothing less.

Margaret enjoyed going about with him. He always had the table in the best location. He always had the best things provided by that particular establishment—and had them provided in the best manner. If they were not, he was capable, with a brief statement made to the proper person, of raising just as much trouble there as he could in the

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plant of the Waring Company by the same means. And he would make his statement with the same low-toned, ice-cold suavity in the one place as in the other.

When he had given his order, he clasped his well-groomed hands on the table before him.

"What do you know," he asked, looking straight at her, "about a substitute for turpentine?"

"Everything," she replied.

"My admiration for you grows every day," he asserted.

"How did you hear of it?"

He hesitated.

"I had a letter—to-day—telling me of it."

"Why did you stop to think before you answered?" she demanded, challengingly.

"Did I stop to think?" was his bland reply.

"I was going to say," he went on, "that if you are thinking of letting Evans run your factory at Bay City, you have made a wise choice. He is of no value to us, because he is dissatisfied. But he is a capable man."

"Let me talk against myself for a moment," she said, in reply. "You had better not let Evans go. Wouldn't it be policy to make him satisfied? I don't

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want to be instrumental in putting him against you instead of for you."

"I realize," he observed, "that Evans may sooner or later put on the market one of his own discoveries, which if successful would cut into our trade. But I am not going to bribe him with higher wages not to do it. If he thinks he can beat us at our game, he is welcome."

"Very good," she replied. "Then I have no compunctions about taking him."

He was silent for quite a while.

"Besides," he said, "it will be a matter of great importance to me to have him working for your success."

"Thank you," she said.

"In addition to that," he went on, "it has occurred to me, as it has of course to you, that if you succeed with this venture in a small way, you will presently wish to succeed in a large way; and you will need capital."

She was interested. This phase of the question she had been giving considerable thought to.

"I am interested," he went on, "because in one year I shall have quite a large sum of money at my disposal. I may be able to help you. The ar-

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rangement will, of course, be to our mutual advantage."

"By that time," she observed, "we shall know whether the turpentine has been well received by the trade, and you can then come in with a minimum of risk?" Sometimes, without knowing just why, she had the feeling that the man was always smoothing the ground for himself.

"I recognize the criticism in your tone," he said, evenly. "Permit me to say this. To show you how much I think of your discovery, I offer you now double what you paid for it—whatever that was."

"Couldn't accept," she replied. "If, however, you are willing to invest that money in the venture and let me have control ——"

"You don't know me," he interrupted. "*I* must have control, if I am to put my energy and money in it."

"If I were to accept the offer you made one evening of last week," she asked, demurely, "would you expect to have control then?"

"Wouldn't you expect me to?" he demanded.

She drew a line on the cloth with her finger. "Doubtless," she replied. But even as she spoke she was conscious of a doubt.

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She regretted somewhat that, in a spirit of banter, she had brought up the question. He leaned forward.

"Can you not accept my offer?" he asked, earnestly. "Then whatever we go into will be on equal shares. And I will put all the money I have, if necessary, into your venture. Think how fine it would be for us to make a tremendous success of this thing—together."

She listened to him with interest.

"We would have," he went on, "a plant bigger—and better—than the Waring Company's. We would call it the York-Potter Manufacturing Company. And you would have your office on the right of the entrance and I would have mine on the left. And at five o'clock every afternoon I would call you up on an intercommunicating telephone and say, 'Mrs. Potter, are you ready to go home?' and you would reply, 'Just a minute, until I sign these letters,' and then away we would whisk in our machine. Can you think of anything more idyllic than such a life?"

"It is a pretty picture," she replied. "You must educate me up to it."

CHAPTER XIX

THE GIFT FROM HEAVEN

“**Y**OU would be extremely foolish,” asserted Dora Garnet, “not to marry Willis Potter. It is an ideal match for a girl with a career before her, as you have.”

“I wish you wouldn’t talk about my career as if it were a case of hay-fever that couldn’t be gotten rid of,” said Margaret. “This ‘career’ that you and Mr. Potter talk about is merely the result of my having to do something to earn my living. I didn’t enter upon it to make myself famous.”

“I am only looking forward,” said Dora, “to your ultimate happiness. When a man marries, he keeps right on with whatever he had been trying to accomplish before. When a woman marries she gives up everything and starts afresh. If you marry Potter, your life can go on with no interruption.”

“What do I get married for?” queried Margaret. “So I can be just the same as I was before, or so I can be different?”

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"Oh, I grant you, you marry, if you marry at all, because you think it is something different and better, which you permit, on that account, to push aside the life you have been leading. But I think it is pathetic for a girl to work up to a state of proficiency in one thing and then give it up at the snap of a finger."

"I think it is pathetic too. And I shan't give up my work until I know that I want to be married so much that I shall not only be willing to give it up but that I shall be willing to give it up with enthusiasm."

"Brave words, fair maiden, brave words. But if you marry Willis Potter, you won't have to give up your work—either with enthusiasm or without it."

"I don't really insist on being married, you know," Margaret explained. "I can manage to be contented right here with you."

"Doubtless, for the present—until there comes along some sweet boy with nice blue eyes and not a red cent—and you will marry him. And if you care to have him possess self-respect, you will let him support you. If you don't, you will give him a job as office boy at Bundy and Son's. Either one of those alternatives would be pleasant."

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Margaret looked at her thoughtfully.

"Dora," she asked, "do you want me to tell you something?"

"Yes."

"Well, those reasons you have given are the very reasons why I am considering Mr. Potter seriously."

"Are you considering him seriously?"

"Sometimes. And then again it makes me ill to think about it."

"Why?"

"I was about to say he was insincere. But he isn't. He is thoroughly sincere to his business, which is the only thing that counts with him. Everything else has to shift for itself, and I should be one of the things that shifted."

"I shouldn't look at it that way. You and he and the business would grow to be synonymous."

"Perhaps. But I don't want to be married to be a synonym," she replied.

She knew, however, that whatever man proposed marriage to her, her present life would temper her decision. Her life had a strong grip upon her. It held her enthusiasm and her interest. She had a pride in it. When she was mentioned in the letters

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of Bundy and Son as "Our Miss York," the badge of servitude thus placed upon her was pleasant and stimulating. It enlisted her in the army of workers—it pointed to her as a wielder of the sword—the holder of five talents, who was acknowledged thereby to be striving to bring in five other talents to place beside them. And what could be more sufficient joy than that?

She thought of Potter and his offer of marriage very frequently, although when he first made it, she had felt that she would never come to view it as a possibility. But she could not help agreeing with Dora that it was advantageous—that his money would give her many things, and that their similarity of occupation would make them congenial. It was only because she sometimes felt that marriage must be meant to be a little more than this—which seemed really to be much more like a business partnership—that she found a real objection to it.

She told herself she did not love him; but that was not a convincing statement. What was love, anyway? Wasn't it mostly a sort of congeniality that one has become accustomed to? And he was congenial. He was interesting—she even admired him. There were no real obstacles in the way. She

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knew that it was possible some day that she might take up the telephone at her elbow and say "Yes" to him.

And then there were other days when she did not want to think about him. These were the days when she felt less buoyant about her business, when things had gone less well, when she had made mistakes or other people had made mistakes for her, and she was dismal about the world. Then she felt no enthusiasm for the shoulder-to-shoulder fight that her marriage with Potter would mean. Then she felt that what she needed was a companion and not a brother-in-arms merely, whose main virtue would be that he was marching in the same direction that she was. She might not be able to extract sympathy from Potter, and, business-woman though she was, she knew perfectly well that she was human.

She had many of these tired days right at this time, when she and Evans were endeavoring to get her small factory running under the very best conditions possible. The barometer of her spirits sometimes sank very low. The constant hammering of little things often used up all the day's enthusiasm before the day was over.

One day in particular was an especially hard tax

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on her endurance. Evans had called her up at seven in the morning and had said there was some equipment they needed which he knew could be bought from a certain firm for a low price. At eight o'clock, therefore, after a sketch of a breakfast, she had boarded a train with him, girded for battle. They had spent a dirty, dusty morning looking equipment over, had dispensed with luncheon in favor of a what-will-you-give, what-will-you-take discussion with the owners concerning its value, and had carried the discussion long into the afternoon. This was business hand-to-hand. The firm they were dealing with was desperately in need of money. And Margaret had to make every penny do double duty. Both sides had stood their ground. Finally, in desperation, she had laid down an ultimatum and left the conference. They had carried their bluff to the last minute and had made no effort to stop her. But they had caught her at the station and had accepted her terms.

All this left her rather limp and worn out. The stimulus of victory bore her up for a time. But the slow journey homeward soon dimmed all the glory of that. The struggle had made every nerve in her alive. She parted from Evans and went home stim-

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ulated as to nerves and not at all stimulated as to body. Her mind was still going at full speed. She needed something soothing, something different, to switch the current of her thoughts. She wondered if at such a time Potter would have been balm for her soul.

It was a feeling very nearly related to homesickness that oppressed her. It was pleasant to know that she would see Dora in a little while. And although Dora might not actually comfort her to any great extent, she was a congenial physical presence, who would change the current of her thoughts. She was the guardian angel who would provide her with a hot dinner and take her afterward in her automobile to the theatre. All this was diverting. She stopped at the first pay telephone station and called Dora.

"Are you tired to death and sick of your humdrum life?" she demanded, immediately.

"Always," replied Dora, contentedly.

"Then hurry home and get ready to go to the theatre with me."

"I will begin to hurry at once."

Margaret boarded a street-car, which wound around the city and dropped her at length at a

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corner more or less remote from the Square. She hurried along oblivious of the late afternoon sunshine.

"Has Miss Garnet come in?" she asked at the door.

"No," replied the maid, "but there is a gentleman to see you."

"A gentleman?"

A figure appeared in the doorway that led into the little parlor.

"Name is Bruce," announced a voice. "David Bruce."

She put down her bag on the hall mantelpiece.

"David," she said, "you're a gift from Heaven."

CHAPTER XX

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

SHE looked him fairly in the eyes—eyes that had been familiar to her for many a day—as eyes but not as books to read things in. For one fleeting instant she felt she read something in them then—something disconcerting yet pleasantly stirring—but just for a fleeting instant. She decided quickly that what she had seen was merely the same frank eagerness of the old days, the same unhidden pleasure in her presence. But her first passing thought touched something deep within her. She remembered that when David had held her hands at the Sawyers' the night of their supper on the island, there had vibrated for a brief second in her a new note whose tone she did not recognize. And again now. Her mind did not grasp the significance of it, but had there been time to think about it, she might have perceived that it was the murmur of a hidden force, that some day a properly-laid fuse might set loose.

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

"Don't take off your gloves," David exclaimed.

"Let's walk out there in the sunshine."

"Oh, but I'm so tired."

"Best thing in the world for you. What you need is ozone. You sit cooped up in an office all day and breathe carbon dioxide, until an atom of real oxygen feels like a hot potato in your lungs."

They went down the white marble steps and entered the parking of the Square.

"Let's stand in the place," she went on, "where there is the most of this oxygen you were talking about."

"There is an abnormal amount of it as you get further in," he replied.

They walked along the gravel path. The trees were covered with young, very green little leaves. New grass and clover had sprung up in the turf, and crocuses pierced the sod, their gaudy heads making the ground look as if some one had thrown colored beads upon it. The afternoon sun was dropping low, and the lace-like shadows of the trees stretched far out across the ground. A brilliant cardinal bird, which Margaret said was a winter-long inhabitant of the place, perched upon the limb of a tree and said, "Che-ew, che-ew, going, going,

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going, going," many times—a pointless sort of remark, it would seem, but one he apparently appreciated.

"Mr. Lacey's garden," David said, "used to look just like this in the evening. I can remember watching the shadow of the box hedge creep across the brick path inch by inch and then climb up the hedge upon the other side."

They walked on in silence.

"And we shall never see that garden again," she observed, at length.

"No. A street cuts right through it, and there are rows of brick houses on either side of the street. Civilization!" he cried, waving his hand.

They walked back. She stooped and picked a four-leaf clover from the grass. She handed it to him and he drew it through his buttonhole.

"May it bring me good luck."

"In what?" she asked, idly.

"In getting what I want."

"Is it money?"

"No."

"Is it reputation?"

"No."

"Is it a girl?" she demanded, smiling.

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

"I couldn't get a girl," he replied, "without having the first two things you spoke of."

"Get the first two, then," she said.

He stirred the pebbles of the walk with his foot.

"And then—can I get the third, do you think?"

"How should I know?"

"To be sure, how should you know?"

She looked at him curiously and parted her lips to say something. But just then the bell of an electric automobile sounded behind them. They faced about and saw Dora Garnet coming toward them. She stopped her machine by the curb in front of them.

"Dora, this is David," Margaret remarked, more by way of explanation than introduction.

Dora looked at his eyes first of all.

"They're not blue," she told Margaret.

"What are not blue?" he asked.

"Your eyes."

He laughed, but looked puzzled.

"Dora said something philosophical the other day about blue eyes," Margaret explained. "I have forgotten what it was, but I know it was good."

"Some day perhaps I may have to tell him myself. Get in, you two, and let's insist on dinner."

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"That means you are invited to dinner, David, so you must explain to Dora how much you admire her house."

David explained.

"Margaret," exclaimed Dora, presently, "I like your Mr. Bruce exceedingly."

"He's not mine."

David looked at her and then said :

"I think, however, Miss Garnet, that your house is not in character, exactly."

She raised her eyebrows.

"You should have adding machines and typewriters and filing cases in all the rooms. That would carry out the idea that you and Margaret are business women. It would give a quaint touch. And, as I understand it, you both consider business as the most important thing in life."

"Not at all," cried Dora, with spirit.

Margaret laughed.

"Well," observed David, "what then do you consider more important than business?"

Dora frowned thoughtfully.

"There are many things ; but I should say that honesty, a happy spirit and love for your fellow-men were more important."

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

"I have them all," he replied, waving his hand comprehensively. "You should approve of me unreservedly."

She leaned toward him.

"You will observe," she said, "that I said love for your fellow-*men*."

He looked at her calmly. He had no objection to admitting that he understood the innuendo.

"Your inference is one step in advance of me," he asserted, smiling.

"Perhaps," she admitted.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Margaret.

"We were discussing whether his eyes were not blue after all," said Dora.

They had a cozy dinner in the oval dining-room, David occupying the large armchair and carving—with the same ease with which he did everything—the brown roast chicken. Under Dora's admiring gaze, he touched it with his knife and, as if the knife had been a magic wand, the bird seemed to fall apart and be ready to serve. He and Dora discovered a congenial uncongeniality in each other. Their views were in converging directions; he gazing, as it were, toward one segment of the horizon

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and she toward another—and the segments overlapping. Dora was materialistic. Her idea was work and thrift first of all. Cash, “the munitions of war,” as she called it, was the paramount consideration. And yet she had lying beneath this a sentimental appreciation of beautiful things. She had the real pleasure of creating in her work, of designing things to make people’s hours of ease more pleasant. David’s paramount interest was in ideas and in things that made him branch out into new fields for ideas. Yet his secondary consideration was thrift. He respected money because he had to make it reach a long way.

They argued with each other and at the same time they sympathized with each other’s point of view. It is possible that Dora rather envied the fact that he was foot-loose and free to indulge his fancy—and it is certain that the contempt he tried to show for her interest in making money was not entirely real.

“I suppose you feel—you business women,” said David, suddenly, “that you are a third sex—superior to women because you have the attributes of men, and superior to men because you have the attributes of women.”

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

"We may feel that," Dora replied, gravely. "But I feel as well a sense of impending disaster. As I grow older there is not the roll of drums about my business as there once was, and I have now lost the martial spirit. I am beginning to plod; younger spirits are overtaking me. When I am an old woman my grip will be all gone. I shall have no business. What shall I have?"

"You will have——" David began, and then stopped.

"That's it—nothing."

Margaret interposed.

"You will have as much as every one else."

"No. Some people have friends or a family, to whom their going and coming makes a difference. I have not. I have spent my life storing up acorns for myself and I shall have to eat them alone."

Margaret looked at her searchingly; and Dora, catching the disturbed look in her face, broke suddenly into a laugh.

"Please excuse me for this melancholy train of thought," she said, quickly. "But when I think of the three-score-and-ten, it chills me to the bone."

David laughed. She switched the conversation to an easier topic so deftly that the tide of sympathy

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that was rising in him never reached its flood, but subsided and was lost in other things. The dusty side of the picture is easy to forget when it is turned toward the wall.

Margaret sat still and listened to them talk. It was interesting to have her two friends brought together thus. Now and then they appealed to her, and she sided now with one and now with the other, impartially. They talked so much that it was nearly eight when dinner was over, and they had to hurry to the theatre. They had no idea what play they wanted to see.

“Anything but Julius Cæsar,” said Margaret.

Finally they found themselves in seats behind a post at a popular musical comedy. Their view of the stage was bad and the show was worse than the view. So David amused himself by making caricatures of the actors and actresses on the back of his program. He would use about six or seven lines in making each one, so that the picture grew right out of the paper while you looked. His companions forgot about the play in their interest in him.

“What is your present business or occupation?” asked Dora, suddenly.

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

"Why," he said, "I am making a seagoing aeroplane."

"What?" she exclaimed, laughing.

"I am making a seagoing aeroplane."

"You had much better stick right to this sort of thing," she announced, firmly, pointing to his pictures.

"I don't know that I want to stick to anything," he replied, smiling. "I suppose you are thinking of magazine illustration," he added.

"Yes."

"That's a long, up-hill fight."

"Dear me, boy!" she cried. "So is everything worth while."

As they drove home after the play, the full moon hung over the centre of the street before them, though it cast no glow beyond the glare of the electric lights. A soft, balmy air blew upon them. At the Square there was actual moonlight, shining on the gravel walks and the new-leaved trees and the sun-dial in the centre where the walks crossed. Dora asked David if he would wait and mail a note she wanted to write.

"Let's go look at some real moonlight," he suggested to Margaret.

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"I'm willing. I must talk to you some time. I can't get a word in edgewise when Dora is present," she said, laughing.

"Miss Garnet is very cordial," he said, "but she doesn't approve of me."

"How is that possible?" she asked, amiably.

"She thinks I am—too much interested in you."

She did not reply. They walked along in silence. The gravel crunched under their feet. There was no other sound save the gentle sighing of the wind in the trees.

"How could she think that?" she asked, presently.

"I think," he replied, "the fear was father to the thought."

They paused by the sun-dial, on which the moon's shadow was registering an altogether fallacious hour.

"But if it isn't true," she said, "why think about it?"

Her glance met his for a moment. In that dim light where her dark eyes shone ever so softly and the white skin of her throat was like ivory, she seemed a goddess. The blood in her was sanctified, and he knew he must think about the thing he had spoken of. For it was true!

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE SAID

"I was about to say ——" he began, leaning toward her.

The white dress of Dora Garnet appeared in the door of the house across the street.

"Margaret," she called.

Margaret looked up. "Not so close, David," she whispered.

David did not say what he had started to say. They walked quickly toward the house. At the door she held out her hand.

"To-morrow," she said.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BYSTANDER

DAVID walked slowly down the street. His footfalls echoed against the silent houses facing the Square. As he crossed the first intersecting way, an automobile hurried toward him, its horn barking impatiently. He continued to walk, neither quickening nor slackening his pace. There was the noise of a gripping brake and the machine came to a full stop. The driver shot a glance at him as he threw in his gear and drove the car forward. But David, interested in his own thoughts, did not notice what had occurred.

At the next corner he should have turned homeward. But he walked on. The warm air blew comfortably in his face. There was a pleasant quiet in the usually noisy streets. He might have been walking in some silent woods, so calm was everything about him. Even the brightly lighted heart of the city was taking a respite from the bustle of the day. The whistle of the never-sleep-

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ing peanut vendor's oven was the loudest sound he heard. Beyond, the street led on to the wharves, the shadowy fingers that pointed out into the river. He walked out upon one of these. The moonlight fell upon the dark waters that splashed and slapped against the pilings below. Out in the stream rode three or four sailboats, their white anchor lights reflected beneath their hulls and their spars never ceasing to move back and forth, writing on the sky.

"I wonder," said David, aloud, presently, to the river conversing at his feet, "what she would have replied if I had said all that I had started to say."

The waves surged and splashed and expressed no definite opinion. They caught the wash of a belated tug ploughing up the channel, and their conversation became turbulent with spray that leaped higher than the piling. The tug was a black silhouette on the bosom of the river, her port running-light gleaming like a ruby and the white marker swinging at the mast astern. Her engine bell sounded across the water, the throbbing of her machinery stopped, and she slid in silently and accurately beside her wharf.

"All these things interest me," he thought. "I seem to like to see the world move by, without

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searching too closely for a place to put my shoulder to help it along."

He leaned against the piling beside him.

"But why should I? Why should I help when it runs along of its own momentum? And if my own wheel is revolving nicely, why should I put a shoulder to it?"

A big man walked out to the end of the wharf.

"What are you doing here, young man?" he demanded.

"Nothing. My friends say," he went on, "that is all I ever do."

"Well, don't you know you aren't allowed to come out on the wharves?"

"No—I didn't know it."

He turned away from the water's edge and walked back with the man.

"I was trying to think out something," he said.

"A good many fellows try to think out things there," returned the other, "and end by jumping in, especially you fellows who do nothing."

"I'll give you a piece of advice free," he continued. "If you're in trouble, go to work. The world has no use for a chap that isn't paying his own way."

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David looked at the man seriously.

"Suppose," he said, "your expenses were a dollar a day and you had a dollar a day coming to you whether you worked or not. What is the answer to that problem—must you work or not?"

The man looked puzzled.

"You work," he replied, doggedly.

"But why? You're a philosopher. Why?"

The other gave the matter thought.

"How about the bees?" he said, at length. "They work hardest when the honey is most plentiful. Say, look here," he broke off. "Suppose your expenses suddenly became two dollars a day?"

"The thought has occurred to me," David responded.

He said good-night and went on. Suppose his expenses did double? What then? There was no immediate answer to that. Also he knew why it was that he had never given this matter serious consideration before. He quickened his pace with a determined air.

"The time has come now," he said, "for me to put my shoulder to the wheel."

CHAPTER XXII

FALLING SHORT

ON the following morning when he awoke, David's glance fell upon his theatre program of the night before. He looked intently at the drawings for a moment and then threw it into the waste-basket. But he could not have denied that an unaccustomed idea had found a place in his mind. When he went down to breakfast, his father was sitting at the table.

"Father," he asked, "don't you know a man who is Art Editor on a magazine in New York?"

Mr. Bruce was deep in his morning paper.

"Yes. His title is misleading. But I know him."

"I may ask you to give me a letter to him."

"I thought you didn't like illustration work," demanded his father, without looking up.

"I don't. But I have been doing things I like for so long, I may try something I don't like for a change."

Mr. Bruce stared at him. "Did you see Margaret last night?"

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"Yes."

"Did she tell you that?"

"No. I suppose she would, had she thought of it."

"How much do you suppose Margaret earns at Bundy's?" David asked, presently.

"Earns about five thousand, gets about three." Mr. Bruce put down his paper. "That makes a large ante for the man who marries her to cover."

"I was thinking that," his son replied.

When he entered Dora Garnet's house that evening, David found Dora alone in the hall at the piano. She held out her hand to him in greeting but went on playing.

"You have come to make love to her to-night?" she said, almost immediately, with carefully judged bluntness.

He was taken aback. He hardly knew what reply to make.

"Why, not in the least," he said, at length.

"If I had any deep purpose at all in coming," he went on, "it was—to bid you good-bye for a while."

She played more softly, her slender fingers just touching the keys.

"Are you going away?"

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"I think so."

"I am glad you decided to do it."

His eyes rested upon hers.

"Otherwise you would have suggested it."

"Well," she said, after a pause, "why shouldn't I? What have you to offer Margaret—besides a good disposition?"

He did not reply. She pursued the idea.

"You must remember," she observed, "that girls now are not as they were fifty years ago. Then they were educated from the time they could walk, with the sole idea in view of their ultimate marriage. No woman had to give up ambition then when she married. She was attaining her only ambition. But nowadays when a man asks a girl to marry him, he asks a girl who has been taught the means of self-support, and it is frequently necessary for him to decide whether that girl will not mar her greater career by a union with his lesser one. No man wants to think that when a girl marries him she does it at the cost of a great self-sacrifice. There is no romance in that."

"Of course not," he said.

"Nothing is more devilish than these childhood friendships. I like you," she went on, "and I love

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Margaret. And I am not going to let you spoil each other's lives."

"Spoil our lives?" he repeated.

"Quite so. Listen to me. Here, on the one hand, is Margaret—young, ambitious and as bright as a new dollar, interested in her work and succeeding as few men do. And she is proud of it—proud to know that everything she has accomplished has been the result of her own efforts."

"That is true," he said.

"On the other hand, here is David Bruce, a sweet, lovable, kind-hearted boy, who is not a producer, never has been a producer, and if called upon now to earn his living, would not know where to start."

She paused.

"Is that true?"

"Almost. I might know where to start," he said, "but that is all."

Her hands left the keys and she turned about until she faced him.

"I will tell you what would happen in case of a marriage between you," she said, slowly. "First prospect." She checked it off on her forefinger. "Margaret would continue to hold her position,

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which is becoming yearly more profitable to her. You would either go to work here yourself, or you wouldn't. It would make no difference. You would be cramped. You would have to stay where she was because she was earning the greater money. If you had an offer of a good place in another city, you couldn't go. If her business took her to another city, you would have to give up your own position and go too. Or, worse than that, you would be employed by her. Where would all her respect and admiration for you go then? Do you think you could hold it? Do you think you could deceive her into believing you were even holding your own respect for yourself? Would you trail at any woman's chariot wheels that way? Or do you suppose any woman would love you, trailing at her chariot wheels?"

"Go on," he said. "I suppose none of those things."

"Second prospect ——" She checked it on her finger. "Suppose she gave up her work, and assumed the conventional position of housekeeper for you—for the purpose of retaining your self-respect. You are now allowed to earn the where-withal for you both. What chance have you to

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succeed? You have never earned your own living; and just at the time you are beginning, you have the stern necessity loom up large before you, of making money enough for two. That is what they speak of as having your nose to the grindstone. And your wife will see you struggling along the trail where she had succeeded, and know that if she had been in your place, you both would not have known poverty and want and—what is worse—discouragement. She will have given up her career for you and you will not have made one for yourself.”

For some time he gazed thoughtfully at the rug at his feet. Then he raised his eyes to hers.

“I have been thinking that out too,” he said.

She began to play again softly.

“Of course,” she went on, “whether you are actually in love with Margaret or not does not make such a great difference. I think that your position is dangerous, and that you had better retreat while you can.”

He gazed at the scroll pattern of the piano. Her hands touched the keys again and played softly. He watched the slender fingers move almost automatically back and forward over the black and

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white path. He had the appearance of a person thinking, yet he was aware that he was not thinking at all. He was simply allowing an idea to rest, unchanging and undeveloped, in his mind, in the same place it had been resting. But now he knew it was to stay there, and that he had better give in to it. He fingered the music that lay on the polished wood beside him.

"I feel that I agree with you," he said at length.

"As to what?"

"That I had better go away."

He did not look at her, but stared at the white keyboard. She made no reply. The music stopped presently and her hands dropped into her lap. She said, with an effort :

"I think that is best."

When Margaret came down, she found them occupying the same positions at the piano that they had taken when he first came in.

"What are you talking about?" she asked curiously. "I have heard your voices rumbling on and rumbling on all the time I have been up-stairs. I think you are both getting entirely too congenial."

"I surprise myself," he said, grimly, "at the way I agree with her."

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She sat down in a Savonarola chair against the wall and twirled the wooden rings at the end of its arms. She made a pretty picture in her old rose dress with her bright cheeks and her still brighter eyes.

"I am glad that you and Dora are not going to quarrel," she exclaimed. "If you are coming here often, it will be so much pleasanter to have us all get on happily together."

"You take so much for granted, Margaret dear. How do you know he is coming often?"

"He'd better," she replied, smiling.

"I am working on some sketches up-stairs," Dora said, without looking at either one of them, and disappeared.

Margaret played a tattoo on the floor. The toes of her shoes, in that chair, just touched the rug. She looked up at him earnestly. He felt his breath come faster. As she sat there, one of her slippers dropped off and clattered to the floor.

"My shoe, please," she cried, laughing.

He knelt down before her. He could feel his hand trembling as he slipped it on her foot. She was so close to him that the folds of her dress over her knees touched his cheek as he bent over. A

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faint perfume breathed from her. He forgot himself, the room, the house,—everything but her. He had but one impulse and that was to reach out and take her in his arms. He wanted her. He wanted to love her—he wanted to touch her—he wanted to hold her.

Just then the door-bell rang. He rose quickly. The maid came through the hall to open the door. She laid a package on the hall table and disappeared again. In the moment of silence, Margaret seemed to feel that something was out of key.

“Well? What has Dora been saying to you?” she demanded.

“Nothing.”

He turned to her.

“Nothing at all—that I didn’t know already.”

He found that he could not stand there passive. Fire burned within him. He wanted to take her in his arms and tell her he loved her. He could not tell her the things that were in his mind. He could not tell her what Dora had told him, because she had made a mere statement of his assets and liabilities at the present moment, viewed from a highly practical standpoint. It was photographically accurate in that it showed the external aspect of the case

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faithfully. It was inaccurate in that it failed to take into consideration that he had not attempted to make a success as an earner of money and therefore could not be said to be a failure at it, as Dora had indicated. He was not a failure. He had lived his life as he had felt it ought to be lived, amid the circumstances in which he had found himself. He was willing to admit that his method of life and power of earning were unequal to the present crisis. But not so himself. He had confidence in himself. He did not propose to explain away his past; he did not propose to make promises as to the future. Those are the two weakest things a man can do. He felt rather strength in his heart and in his body. He would try out that strength, and make his statement when he had accomplished his end.

He must have more to bring her, he must win first. If he was going he must go quickly. He held out his hand.

“Good-night.”

She rose, a disturbed look on her face.

“You are not going—now?”

There was a silence. Her hand held his in a warm firm clasp.

“You asked me a moment ago,” he said, with an

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effort, "what was the matter with me. There is something the matter with me. I haven't made good."

She found her hand free.

"That is the reason I am going," she heard him say.

She saw him take his hat and move toward the door. She made a step toward him. Had he seen her eyes he would not have gone.

"David," she whispered.

He paused, almost as if he had not heard. She did not move, then, nor say one other word. She gathered herself in hand. If he felt that way—that he had not made good—she could see, even in her excitement, that it would not do to bid him stay. It was his problem—his battle. She simply stood there looking at the floor. And presently the door closed.

It was a long while afterward that Dora came down-stairs and found her still standing there.

"What did he say to you?" she demanded.
"Are you crying?"

"No," said Margaret, looking her squarely in the eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HIVE

THE sun-dial in the Square registered many a day. The leaves on the trees grew large and threw full shadows on the ground. Crocuses were succeeded by pansies and pansies by red geraniums. The grass grew and was mowed and trimmed, and watered to refresh it from the rays of the hot summer sun. Katydids appeared, and locusts sang among the trees in the evening, predicting still hotter weather to come. The dog days of summer dragged their weary length through. September rains fell and the brown grass flourished and grew green; and before long its verdant surface was dotted here and there with migratory birds, already winging their way southward. The first crimson patches appeared in the trees. Chestnut burrs opened and dropped their brown harvest on the ground. Autumn had pushed summer over the line.

Bundy and Son had flourished through the heat.

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It was their best summer for many a day. Margaret disposed of all her wood preservative and earned her thousand dollars back again, which she put immediately into improvements in her factory at Bay City. The turpentine substitute—"Turpentine-oil" as they called it—was beginning to find a demand in a small way. They were selling all of the modest quantity they were able to manufacture. They had also sold some of Evans' enamel finish and were confident that they were going to be successful in selling very much more. Mr. Bundy had become so much excited over these new ventures that several times he had failed to be on hand to see some of his dearest parasites emerge from the host.

"Which only goes to show," observed Margaret, "that when a man begins to take an interest in business, he neglects the more important things in life."

And many leagues to the north, the same long summer had changed into the same chill fall. The peanut vendors on the street corners roasted chestnuts just as they did on Severn Street. Overcoats appeared—and football colors. People thronged the streets down-town to note the clothes other people actually proposed to wear. All the forenoon in a

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certain city, a thousand men and women with leisure apparently unlimited promenaded the south side of the narrow fashionable street.

Twelve o'clock struck. In a narrow side street—so narrow that had you fallen in stepping over one curbstone, you would have surely hit your head upon the other—sat a tiny house with a knocker on the door. It was just like all the other unprepossessing houses on this unprepossessing street, save that in the place of two lower lights of the wide small-paned window were leaded glass figures of seated monks who stared at each other across the opening. A smell of cooking things assailed your nostrils, and now and then a man put a key in the Yale lock of the door and entered, letting the door slam behind him. Thereupon he looked for his mail on a rack, where rested a few well-worn letters and now and then a new one. This ritual performed, he threw his hat on some article of furniture, ducked his head and descended a narrow stair, following with a primitive instinct the scent of food to regions below. A fire burned there in a fireplace and a number of men already seated about the U-shaped table greeted him perhaps with scurrilous remarks, which he would try, in an absent sort of way, to reply

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smartly to, although he was really more interested in getting a cup of coffee out of a big brass coffee urn on a side table. Having obtained this, he proceeded very carefully, balancing his cup and walking, like a man on a tight-rope, to a vacant spot at the table.

Other men entered and sat down where opportunity offered. But it developed from conversation that persons accustomed to lunching at the north end of the table could not lunch comfortably at the south end, and vice versa. A gentleman at the north end admitted that this was due to the fact that the conversation at the other end was exceedingly humdrum and cut-and-dried, while the conversation at his end was possessed of much sparkle.

At each end of the table sat a platter with meat upon it and a dish of vegetables. As the meat and vegetables possessed no conversational powers, it was permissible to make your levy from either dish, although invasion of the other side called forth rumblings of discontent.

This was an artists' club. The name on the bulletin-board up-stairs assured you of that, as well as the fact that the temperamental conversation about this board dealt entirely with politics, football, breeds

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of dogs, how to raise tomatoes, fishing, the relative value of white Leghorns and white Wyandottes, and all the kindred topics dear to the artistic soul. A thin, silent old fellow with grizzled hair and a grizzled mustache bent comfortably over his food, as though he were sincerely interested in it. When addressed he answered with a drawl, as though he were quite too tired to talk.

You would have said he could not paint a picture and you might have followed him around for days without changing your opinion. He would put on a rusty old suit and a rusty old hat and a rusty old expression, and wander aimlessly down among the wharves like a stevedore out of a job. And after a time he would sit down and undo his kit, in a spot where the odor from the sugar refineries was virile enough to curdle his colors and where on the surface of the river floated a scum of oil and grime. And he would paint a big tramp steamer unloading guano. Perhaps he would paint there for two or three days without becoming unconscious, and he would bring the picture home under his arm and hang it out to air. And when it was cured, it usually proved, even without the odor, to have a feeling of realism and humanity that made it a real picture.

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It is a tribute to him that he made his living solely by his painting. He had very little money, but it is rather a strange thing that while every one about him was worrying about money, that was the one thing that never seemed to bother him at all.

"Terry," said some one, reaching over his shoulder to spear a piece of meat from the dish which Terry had strategically placed in front of himself, "where have you been for the last week?"

"Fishin'," said Terry.

"Did they bite?"

"Only the mosquitoes."

The man passed on collecting his luncheon from various migratory dishes which were scattered about the table. A member at the other end of the table spoke up.

"What's this I hear, Terry, about your becoming a model?" he asked.

"That's me."

"A model!" some one exclaimed.

A pleased smile appeared on his face.

"I've been posing for one of these young fellows." He looked carefully over the plate for a satisfactory piece of meat. "He wanted a picture of an artist," he explained.

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A shout of laughter greeted this statement.

"Well, that's what he said. I told him sure I'd pose—I'd been noted for my beauty since a child. Seems he was making some illustrations for a magazine serial—about an artist. He took pains to tell me it was a poor artist. Well, I didn't know there was any other kind, but I said all right. And he said, 'Now, you look like you were down and out and didn't have a cent.' " Terry leaned back in his chair. "And I told him," he said, "I didn't have to change my expression a particle."

"You must have plenty of time on your hands to spend it posing for fellows, Terry."

"Well, I liked this young chap, and he seemed anxious to make good—so I thought I'd help him out."

Several men rose to go. They stood aside to let a young man come down the narrow stair. He nodded to them and stopping by the coffee urn, tipped it experimentally.

"Dry," he observed.

"Say, Terry," asked some one at the table, "who was this fellow?"

Terry looked up.

"There he is now," he replied, pointing to the man by the coffee urn.

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"Oh, Bruce! Hello, Bruce. Come in and sit down."

Bruce looked hopefully about among the remnants of the lunch.

"Davie," said a man near him, "sit down here and tell us about it. Terry says you have a big commission to illustrate a serial."

The young man laughed.

"I wish you would let me tell you about that," he said. "I have been after a number of magazines over in New York trying to get them to give me work, and they wouldn't. There is one magazine in particular, which you know about, that I have laid steady siege to; but all attacks were repulsed until one day I told them that if they would let me have a serial that they were not in a hurry about I'd make illustrations for it, and if they didn't like them, they could send them back, and if they did like them, they could have them as a gracious gift. And they were so sick of me they handed me out a story—just to get rid of me."

"You are some business man."

"Well, I had to have the work. The next day I'd planned to take a pistol in with me. And having at last got the chance, I decided that the way to make

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good with these magazine fellows was to accentuate character—to get away from the stereotyped stuff and make all the people just as human as possible. I thought Terry was a good, interesting type, and I finally played on his feelings so that he agreed to pose for me.”

“May we see the pictures?” asked a man down at the other corner of the table.

“Sorry,” said David, “but I had to send them off.”

“Well, when they come back ——” began the other, and checked himself. “I beg your pardon,” he said, smiling.

“Oh, don’t apologize for an idea like that. I didn’t have much hope they’d keep them when I sent them.”

“Have you heard anything about them yet?” asked Terry.

David looked up at him with the smile of a cat that has just swallowed a canary.

“Got a letter from the editor this morning,” he exclaimed, “saying he was going to use them.”

A shout went round the table.

“But you get nothing for them.”

“Yes, I do. The letter said they were so well

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pleased with the work that they did not feel that they ought to hold me to my bargain. So they enclosed a modest check."

Terry struck a match and held it to his pipe.

"I am on the way," he said, "to becoming famous."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE EXCEEDING HIGH MOUNTAIN

DAVID was extremely cheerful over the success of his first venture. But he was on the train the next day bound for New York. He did not work in New York, because he knew hardly any one at all there, and he needed companions and friends—people to keep him stimulated and cheerful. So he lived where he knew people, and traveled on the train to the mart of trade. And they gave him another story to illustrate—mostly because he seemed bound not to leave the office until they did give it to him.

During the long hot summer months when he had been doing no work at all, he had tried to reduce himself to formula—to understand himself. And he decided that for him nothing failed like success. Success in any particular direction bored him. Throughout his life when he had proved to himself that he could do any particular thing, his ambition in regard to it had been satisfied, and he had felt that it was necessary for him to turn to

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something else. He knew, therefore, that as soon as he found he could make the magazines use his drawings, his tendency would be to lose interest. And it was then he would have to work harder than he had worked before.

He did not let Margaret know what he was doing. His idea was to get an undisputed foothold before he made a statement. He wanted to be convinced himself before he attempted to convince her. And he felt that no feat half accomplished would convince either of them. But the important thing was that he had found himself. He felt that he was building a foundation on rock bottom—a foundation to support a slowly-rising edifice of ambition, enthusiasm and hard work.

He began to get enough to do to keep him busy—so much that it was necessary for him to start work in his little third-story studio at nine in the morning and plod right on, with an hour's intermission for lunch, until five in the evening. This made him restless. He would tear himself away from the men at the little club at one o'clock and go back to the solitude of his studio, realizing that he had to paint at the picture clamped to the easel before him, and that, if he was to finish it, he must

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paint until dark that day and the day after and the day after that and so on.

Outside he could see the sun shining and people walking along and other people in automobiles. But he had to stay indoors and drive himself forward. Perhaps the picture he was working on was an interior, in which he had to indicate pains-taking detail on a scarf hanging over a table or in a rug or on the ornament of a mantelpiece. Or perhaps it was an exterior with a balustrade, in which each baluster had to be drawn and the shadows cast upon it, every one the same, right across the sheet. There was no inspiration about it—it was simply the drudgery of the profession he had chosen. A plodding nature would have taken it without question as a part of the day's work. But his nature was not to plod.

He welcomed the men who dropped in to gossip. He would lean back in his chair and listen to them as long as they chose to stay. He could not draw while any one was in the room, so a visit cut just that much out of his day. And sometimes a man would come by in an automobile and propose a jaunt for the afternoon. And if the day was fine and he felt sluggish about his work, he would

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reason that he would be in better trim to draw on the morrow if he got out and toned himself up a little to-day. So he would lock the door of his studio and go.

After a few indulgences of this kind, he would find that he was getting behind and would work at night to catch up. When things got to that state he would strive to cover surface, and forget that it was not simply area he was supposed to deliver—but ideas. He found presently that some of his pictures began to come back to him, as unavailable.

This was a hard blow. He saw that he had to begin all over again. He must cultivate concentration. This meant remodeling himself. He had done a great deal of modeling in his life—in soft clay. But this was harder.

However, every morning thereafter when he came to his studio, he decided how much he would accomplish during the day and, with that goal fixed before him, he found he was able to plod along more steadily. It was the old story of tying an apple in front of the donkey's nose. But it works for either animal. If a visitor poked his head in the door, he would remark, "Busy, old man," and

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go on drawing. And then he had a large sign painted with "Model posing" inscribed on one side of it and "Gone to lunch" on the other, which he allowed to hang almost continually on the outside of his door, one face or the other showing.

By the time he had held himself to his task thus from Thanksgiving through the winter until Easter, laying out his work every morning and striving all day to accomplish what he had laid out, he found that he was gradually fitting into the channel he had scooped out for himself. He was becoming a creature of habit, and he was more and more astonished every day at the hold habit could obtain upon him. He even came to the point when he discovered that good sleep put him into better shape to paint on the following day. He went to bed regularly at the unearthly hour of eleven or thereabouts, and rose at the still more unearthly hour of seven. It must not be supposed that any of these innovations were accomplished without the wrenching apart of his soul. But as the determination to succeed was imbedded in him firmly, and the object of his striving was never out of his mind for one minute of the day, he would have allowed

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himself to be stretched on the rack if he thought it would make him more able to get what he wanted.

As he grew more and more accustomed to his new life there came compensations he had never dreamed of. The pleasant exhaustion at the end of the day, bringing with it the knowlege that something had been accomplished and that he had earned the leisure now on his hands, was more thrilling and consoling than any other pleasure could have been. He began to see that the drudgery of taking infinite pains over his pictures was only a fancied drudgery, for the absolute attention to detail gave his pictures a realism and definiteness that more than repaid him for his pains. He had no respect for his pictures unless they were real. If he had a dinner table to draw, he made a dinner table with the silver and glass and flowers and linen and the drawn-work cloth. If he were painting soldiers he saw to it that their uniforms, their insignia, the pattern of their arms and such matters were as nearly correct as he could make them.

The thing that was pleasing him most of all was the fact that he was making out of himself day by day a more and more efficient machine.

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However, as spring came on, it began to be harder to stay indoors when he could work with his windows open and hear the first chirping of the birds. He had the feeling that it would be nice to lie down somewhere under a tree.

One day a friend came into his studio.

"I have a proposition to make to you," he said.

David laid down his brush.

"I'm listening," he replied.

"You're getting stale," continued the friend, "you need a change of scene—something to freshen you up."

David ought to have recognized the insidiousness of those words. But they only struck him hard in the weakest spot of his armor.

"Now I have just the chance for you—a chance to go abroad and have all your expenses paid. It will give you new experiences, new scenes and a chance for plenty of new local color. There is an expedition going over to Greece to dig up old temples and so forth, and they need an all-around man like you, who can draw, to make pictures of what they find. It's an easy job. Four months over there, and two weeks each way on the water. You'd come back in the fall fit as a fiddle."

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The man left, bearing David's promise to think it over. David did think it over. There was no work that afternoon. He went down to the river and watched a liner pull out from her dock and drop down-stream, with her flags flying and her rail crowded with people. And when he looked at the lugubrious throng of friends on the wharf who waved their handkerchiefs at the departing craft, he felt as if he too had bade farewell to a lifelong friend. The picture of the boat was engraved upon his mind. It seemed as if he absolutely must go.

In the evening he walked a long way and tried to think it out. He knew and had known from the instant the scheme was first proposed that if he left his post now he left it forever. He did not try to gloss over the fact that if he left he would acknowledge himself beaten. It was a discussion pure and simple between desire and conscience. His desire tried to convince him that if he stuck to his work in his present frame of mind he might just as well not work at all for all the good he would accomplish. It tried to convince him as it had convinced him a thousand times before that he needed change. And he had been so accustomed to giving in to it that he hardly knew how to combat it. But all the while a

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small voice which he supposed was conscience kept just within view the fact that he was working to accomplish something.

He let his mind go back over his struggles during the past year—first of all the determination to start out to succeed; the long, hot days trying to get a foothold; the fight to keep himself in trim to hang on to the advantage he had already gained. Those things represented the hard battles in a life that was not accustomed to battles. Should he acknowledge himself beaten?

Beaten! He who had entered the arena with the confidence of a veteran; who would not stoop to make promises of success, because he had been so certain he would succeed. Would he set aside his hope of success in favor of a mere craving for new adventures and new places on the earth?

He stopped where he was on the sidewalk. It seemed suddenly as if all the discussion had been going on in some other mind than his own. It had no place in his. He must get rid of it—cleanse his soul of the idea.

“I’ll stay here and sit in my studio,” he exclaimed, “if I don’t do a stroke of work between now and Christmas.”

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There was a store at the corner. He rushed in and shut himself in the telephone booth there. Bystanders probably thought he needed first aid for the injured ; and he did. He finally got his friend of the afternoon on the wire.

"Hello," he said. "This is Bruce. I can't go on that expedition you spoke of."

CHAPTER XXV

THE GIFTS OF GODS

ABOUT this time the magazine began publishing the serial for which David had made his first illustrations. That gave him a new lease of life. The pictures made quite a little sensation and he began to get letters about them—letters in commendation, letters criticizing them and letters asking his prices for doing more. He felt now as if the life he had claimed was beginning to claim him; and that fact was a bigger tie to his work than he had ever supposed would be given him.

He wondered if Margaret would see the magazine. There were so many magazines that it was only by chance she might see it; and if she did and were not looking for his name, she would doubtless not know that he had done the pictures. Sometimes he had an impulse to send her a copy of it, but he knew that it was not such a great achievement he had made after all, and that it would be best to wait.

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One day he was returning from New York and, getting off the train at the station, an impulse seized him, instead of hastening down on the street, to linger in the concourse and watch the multitude. He saw a thousand people pass by him—interesting, uninteresting, commonplace, unusual, beautiful, ugly, urban, suburban, French, Chinese, fat, fashionable, thin, without finding a single face he had ever seen before. But the face of the thousandth and first person he had seen before. The face was Margaret York's.

Of course it does happen that sometimes when the sun is shining brightly and the sky is as blue as the sea, a peal of thunder explodes suddenly overhead out of nothing at all. And it does sometimes happen that a person walking along in a crowded street glances down and discovers a string of pearls on the sidewalk. But these circumstances occasion no more astonishment than was written on the faces of Margaret and David as they met in that unexpected place.

Margaret began to laugh.

"Well, David!" she exclaimed.

He caught her hand in both of his. He would have taken her in his arms if he had done what the

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excited heart inside him wanted to do. As it was, he simply held the hand—and looked at her. She smiled.

“Don’t you talk?” she asked, presently.

“I had to see what you looked like first.” He glanced about him. “Shall we go in there and sit down?”

“Yes. I have ten minutes,” she said.

“Ten minutes!”

“I am taking a train to Pittsburgh. I got in about an hour ago and have been to see a man for Mr. Bundy. I am bound West now to see another man for myself.”

“A man for yourself,” he repeated, smiling. “I hope he suits you.”

“Don’t be foolish. I wouldn’t go all the way to Pittsburgh for that.”

“Especially after what you have found here,” he suggested.

“And I had to come a fairly long way to see him,” she said.

There was something inquiring in her tone. He wanted to tell her then just what he was doing, but as yet he had really accomplished nothing. And the recent occasion when he had nearly succumbed

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to temptation and given up was still a sore point. So he thought it best not to lay claim to virtue just yet.

"How is your turpentine coming on?" he asked, in a moment.

When he glanced up he caught a look of interest on her face that faded as he asked the question—as if she had expected that he would say something about his work.

"It is coming on very well," she replied. "We are selling all of it we can make, and people are using it just as if it were real turpentine. In fact, the demand is getting far beyond our powers of production."

"Can't you make some one lend you money to build a whopping big factory?"

"That is just what I am going to Pittsburgh for. There is a man out there named Kimball who is loaded down with money. He saw the factory at Bay City and wrote me a letter about it."

They walked out to the train together.

"Are you happy?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You have become so used to being away from home," she said, "you do not get homesick."

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"Never until this last year," he replied.

He was anxious not to miss a minute of her. He went aboard the train and stayed until the cars began to move.

"Good-bye," he said, then, holding her hand tightly.

She looked up into his eyes.

"I have missed you," she said.

He stared down at her. The train was moving. If he could only have stopped it, held it where it was, made it give him one more minute of her. But its wheels were turning and the platform beside it was slipping by. It would not even split a second and give him the half of it. He hurried away, the words still sounding in his ears.

They sounded in his ears long after he had stepped off the swiftly moving train and made his way, unseeing, down the long platform, through the crowds of people and out upon the street.

He found himself after a while at his studio, not quite certain by what route he had reached it. He found on his table a letter—a letter from a very important magazine. He read it through. Then he sat down and read it through again, his eyes bright with wonder.

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"Well," he admitted at length, "I guess it's true, or they wouldn't have signed it."

In part the letter read as follows :

"We have been very much pleased with the last work you have done for us—so much so that we have decided to give you a large commission. We have a serial story for which we will need illustrations in color. We think you are just the man to do them provided you can do them quickly. Please let us know if six weeks is sufficient time. There are to be ten illustrations and we will pay you one hundred and fifty dollars apiece for them."

He continued to stare at the letter.

"If I had known I was going to get that," he said, "I would have asked her how much she missed me."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CHILD

FOR four weeks David worked at top speed on his ten pictures. They were all outdoor pictures—to be full of the spirit of the sea and sky, to breathe salt air, to be whipped across by ocean breezes. And at the end of the four weeks when the pictures were drawn and he was blocking them out with the first washes of color, he began to see that he had no feeling of sea and sky and great spaces in his tiny shut in studio. It cramped him, as if he were trying to draw and there was not room for his elbow.

He knew that he must get away. And when he learned that the spring rising of the river—of short duration this year—had already swept over his island and subsided again, he wrote down to have his portable house set up upon it, and made arrangements to go there immediately with his pictures and paraphernalia with the idea of finishing them there. This decision made, he was happy and excited as a boy. He sat down and wrote a

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letter to Margaret telling her that he was coming to his island and would see her on his way. As he wrote it he felt with a sense of satisfaction that he had earned his right to see her.

"Are you glad?" asked Dora, when Margaret had told her of the contents of the letter.

"I am afraid I am. But it is a responsibility. There are so few places in this life in which you can do just as you want to without thinking of the consequences. And I am thinking always of the consequences of my liking David too well."

She poked the letter into a pigeonhole of her desk.

"And loving a man would not be the wholly sentimental affair with me that it is with a girl just out of high school. It would be the choosing between two careers. Now I am happy in my present life, but if I should find that I need David, then I am going to take it for granted that that means I need to keep David's house and that I need to"—she hesitated—"to care for David's children."

She looked at Dora defiantly.

"I don't lay that down as a rule for other people in my position. But that is what I want. Should I have children, I should want to devote my life to making them well and strong—and happy."

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"I understand," said Dora.

"But don't you see that I would have to be very sure that I wanted David beyond a shadow of a doubt, to be willing to give up my present career—which I have made for myself by my own efforts—and take him and his, blindly, for better or for worse."

"With the chances in favor of the worse."

"Yes, but if I loved him, and he wanted me," she said, "I would take him no matter what the chances were."

"Do you know," she went on, "I could tell you a surprising thing. You and I are rather smugly satisfied that we have succeeded in a financial way, and frown down upon David because he has not. But he has a clearer grasp of the situation than we have. I go on accumulating without having decided whether that is absolutely the best thing I can do with my life. David decides that hunting the almighty dollar for the sake of the dollar is wrong, and in the face of the criticism of all his friends attempts to find out what he was put upon the world to do—and then to go out and do it."

They were driving along a crowded down-town street, whose sidewalks were lined with all the bright colors incident to the dressmaking and millinery of

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a late spring day. Theoretically civilization had taught this throng to attire itself quietly and inconspicuously ; but the intoxicating excitement of putting on clothes had drawn them away from mere theory and led them to strive onwards and upwards into higher keys. No soft low color tones in this gathering—rather pigments fresh from the tube. It was a living impressionist picture. A decorative young woman strolled by, her coat a shade obtained by steeping the fabric for months in crushed strawberries. It was a striking contrast to the white skirt and dragged one's unresisting eye toward it. Too much like a magazine cover, indeed ! But magazine covers and young girls must be looked at, else what would be the use of having either of those articles ?

But Margaret glanced only casually at the color schemes drifting by and saw with unspeculative eye the bright yellows, the startling pinks and the vibrating greens. She was thinking of other things. And then suddenly a look of very violent interest came into her eyes. It was a girl all dressed in white that she saw, with tiny old rose ribbons at her wrists and neck and wide old rose cap-strings tied under her chin. The tops of her short stockings were adorned by narrow pink bands and small

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patent-leather pumps shone as they moved in short steps over the pavement. Amid the spectroscopes on the sidewalk this person was the most conspicuous, to Margaret. She clutched Dora by the arm, startling that lady so much that she almost ran her machine into the sidewalk.

"Look," she cried, with a fervor scarcely commensurate with the occasion, "the Sawyers."

Dora, whose mind when driving was never quite free from the thought of the host of near-sighted old ladies at street-corners, whose lives she held in the hollow of her hand, applied the brakes so that the automobile went through the preliminary motions of turning a somersault, and then stopped exhausted by the sidewalk. The child turned round wide eyes toward it.

"Oh, mother, see the naughty automobile."

The mother turned with a reproof upon her lips but did not utter it, for she beheld her offspring raised bodily from the ground by an attractive and very well dressed girl. The child's mind moved quicker than the mother's.

"Aunt Mardret," she exclaimed.

"Of course it's Aunt Mardret," that person replied, and, kissing the child upon the very tip of her

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nose by way of humorous addition to the remark, set her down again upon the pavement, so that she might speak to her mother.

"Think of seeing you by chance this way," was Elsie Sawyer's surprised comment.

"You were just about to say 'What a small place the world is.' Now I have said it for you," Margaret observed.

Margaret presented Dora, and Dora persuaded Elsie and the child to get in the machine and be taken to wherever they were going. But they had been everywhere they had intended going. They were en route for the seashore and had missed their train. They had four hours to wait in the city for another one.

When Dora and Margaret heard this they felt that it was a propitious time to declare a holiday for the afternoon. Dora drove home—and the little chubby hand of the child held her arm tightly as she drove. That warm clasp brought a gentle smile to her lips, and to her eyes a light of joy and pride, as if she were imagining that the chubby hand and the chubby girl belonged actually to her. Presently the little bonneted head dropped sideways against her arm and the heavy eyelids closed automatically.

THE CHILD

"Long past nap time," observed the mother, treating the occurrence in a matter-of-fact way as if it were of no consequence at all. But Dora drove very slowly and carefully, risking the lives of hundreds of innocent pedestrians, because she would not ring the bell for fear of rousing the child. Margaret, sitting on the floor by Mrs. Sawyer's feet, watched the little scene intently, with a feeling almost of jealousy that the small curly head was resting against Dora's arm and not against her own. What jest of Nature's was it to put mothers' hearts in these women whose lives had to do with the market-place and the money-changers?

At the house Margaret and Dora were permitted to undress the inert little bundle and put it to bed in Margaret's own room. The windows were raised to a carefully adjudged point, to let in what seemed to be the proper amount of air, the shades were drawn to another carefully adjudged point to exclude the exactly proper amount of healthful yet sleep-disturbing sunshine, chairs were placed by the side of the wide bed to forestall a tendency to fall from its dizzy height—all by these amateur hands intrusted with heavy responsibility. They stood by the bedside and gazed at the shock of yellow curls upon the

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pillow, and the small—oh, so small—head making but a tiny spot in the midst of the great area of the coverlet of the big, grown-up bed. They stole on tiptoe from the room and closed the door gently behind them.

As they turned to descend the stairs, their eyes met. Dora paused, her hand grasping the newel-post behind her.

"That is the sort of thing," she said, slowly, "that I missed—a long while ago."

Margaret nodded. The child had brought to light in each of them a primitive element—as though somehow they had harked back to a previous life. It was the instinct to possess, to protect, and to rear to manhood an infant of their species—an instinct always present but often smothered by the multiplicity of other calls made by the complicated and diverse civilization that surrounds us.

"I have talked about your career many times," Dora went on. "Perhaps that is because I am always trying to convince myself that my career and the achievement of my personal ambition is the most important thing for me. But—whatever you do, don't deliberately miss—that—as I did."

CHAPTER XXVII

A GRACEFUL EXIT

"EVANS," asked Mr. Bundy one day, "how much damage did the freshet do at your factory?"

Evans seated himself by Bundy's desk.

"None at all. The water was so low it hardly came over the banks. But I shouldn't be surprised if we had another one as soon as it rains again."

"I never heard of such a thing," observed Margaret. "If I thought there was a chance of it, I wouldn't put in that new crop of the turpentine plant."

"I'm only guessing," returned Evans. "I wish you had the capital," he added in a moment, "to plant the whole fifty acres in it."

"She will have before the summer's over," exclaimed Bundy. "I'll bet she gets Kimball to put his money in it."

"I wish I were sure of it," observed Margaret.

"So do I," Evans exclaimed.

He rose and strode up and down the floor.

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"If we don't," he went on, "the Waring Company will drive us out."

"You're pessimistic to-day," said she. But she looked at him keenly. Evans stopped beside her desk.

"Potter," he said, "has had his eye on that turpentine ever since the day you bought the rights."

"Oh, no," replied Margaret, smiling, "he didn't know about it until nearly a week afterward."

Evans shook his head.

"Let me tell you something. I found out yesterday that the very day you bought the rights, a man Potter sent down to Bay City to look over the factory discovered that old Venn was making this turpentine substitute, and tried to buy the rights from Groh that very evening. But you were ahead of him."

"I remember Venn saying the man had been there," remarked Margaret, thoughtfully. "Why," she added, suddenly, "Potter must have known the next day all about it."

"He did. The man came up on the afternoon train and told him."

Margaret dipped her pen in the ink and scribbled idly on her pad.

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"That train gets in at four," she said. "And Potter called me up about five o'clock—I remember I had my hat on ready to leave."

She stopped abruptly, her pen poised in the air.

"Why, he came to see me that very night and—and ——"

The color deepened in her face.

"No matter," she remarked, quickly. "What leads you to believe Mr. Potter has 'his eye on our turpentine'?" she added.

Evans looked at her curiously.

"He has begun to fight me, as you know. He has sent you a sample of an enamel finish with which he means to rival mine."

"And charges only about two-thirds as much for it," said Bundy.

"That's it exactly. It was made for the sole purpose of driving me off the market. And as they have about a thousand times as much money as I have, they can keep on underselling me until I am bankrupt."

Bundy bit his mustache.

"But that looks more as though they had their eye on your product," he said, "than on the turpentine."

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"They are coming at me first because my stuff is hurting their business, and they mean simply to eliminate it. And I believe Potter figures that, if one product made in the factory fails, no one will want to put money in the other."

Margaret nodded.

"And then," continued Evans, "he will come along in a friend-of-the-family way and offer, since no one else will let you have money, to finance the operation himself,—and dictate his own terms."

Bundy stroked the back of his head.

"I think he's a rascal," he said, after a little consideration.

"Oh, no," replied Margaret, "that's just his idea of business. But very soon now we'll have our money, I hope, and we can snap our fingers at him."

Evans rose to go.

"Did you make an analysis of this paint that the Waring Company is using to undersell you?" asked Bundy.

"Yes. I put it there on your desk." He turned to Margaret. "But even if you get money, it will not help me, will it?"

"If I get the money," she replied, "I will leave you no room for complaint."

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Practically the only prospect she had of getting the money to manufacture her turpentine on a large scale was William Kimball. When she had seen him in Pittsburgh he had been most optimistic about her discovery and seemed to be very favorably inclined toward it. She had recently sent him some samples of the product which he wanted to turn over to chemists and others for the purpose of obtaining expert opinions. She did not see how the opinions could be unfavorable, and yet she was anxious about them. She knew that she would not feel confident about it until Mr. Kimball had actually consented to advance the money.

The Waring Company had made her one offer of financial aid. But as this offer included the stipulation that the Waring Company was to have the controlling interest, and was to buy all the turpentine they themselves used at cost, she felt that it eliminated her ; so she had declined. She found out afterward that the offer had not been made until the Waring Company had themselves tried to make the turpentine substitute, and failed. They had obtained some of the seed for the plant, and had tried to raise it. But they had planted it at the wrong season of the year, and in the wrong kind of soil. They had no

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notion as to when it should be cut, or how it should be handled after cutting. These and a hundred other things were secrets discovered by old Venn after many years of experiment, and known now only by him. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Waring Company had failed to get an oil resembling turpentine.

Late in the afternoon a familiar automobile drove up before the office of Bundy and Son, and a familiar figure, thoroughly groomed, so that not a fold in his suit hung wrong and not a hair of his head lay amiss, alighted from it. It was Mr. Potter, a trifle more rounded and heavy than a year ago and a little more florid of face, but very distinguished.

He entered the private office with customary assurance and with perfect finish and grace greeted Margaret and Mr. Bundy. It was an education to watch him. He never knew a moment of hesitation. There seemed to be no lever one could touch that would throw him out of poise.

Mr. Bundy smoothed the already smooth hair at the back of his head with an air of uneasiness.

"Sit down," he said, without looking at the visitor, "sit down."

Mr. Potter sat down.



“IT OUGHT TO BE MORE COSTLY”

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"Did you get a sample of our new enamel finish?" he asked presently.

Bundy drummed nervously on the arm of the chair.

"Why, yes," he replied.

"I came down here," Potter said, "to offer you some very special rates. In order to make it worth your while to introduce it among your customers, we are willing to let you have it at fifteen cents less per gallon than the price we quoted you."

"This is a product similar to the one Evans is manufacturing, isn't it?" asked Bundy, drawing parallel lines on his blotter.

"Why, yes, I think it is. Discovered about the same time. Only his seems to be more costly." Potter said this in a satisfied tone of superiority.

Two little pink spots appeared on Mr. Bundy's cheeks. Margaret had never seen him angry before.

"It ought to be more costly," he asserted.

"Why?" shot out Potter.

Bundy fumbled, with clumsy fingers, among the papers on his desk and at length drew out the paper Evans had given him.

"Here is an analysis of your paint," he exclaimed, trying to be very calm and failing to produce any

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effect but that of great excitement. "By that it appears that the price you now offer us is less than the cost of the material you put in it."

Bundy pushed the piece of paper away from him with an injured air.

Margaret looked at Potter to see how he would take this astounding statement. But their visitor merely smiled and waved his hand.

"Of course you must understand," he observed, easily, "that with a large organization like ours we can do many things that would be suicide for the average firm. With our facilities for getting special prices, etc. ——"

Mr. Bundy rose. His face was very red and his neck seemed to have suddenly become too large for his collar.

"Do you think I am a child?" he shouted, in his thin voice. "Special prices! You buy at the market. I know that. I haven't been in this business for twenty-five years not to know what you have to pay for things. You are selling this inferior product of yours below cost to drive Evans out of business. You know you are! And if you say you are not," he cried in an awkward burst of indignation, "you lie."

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He glared at Potter like a little terrier bullying a mastiff. Margaret gazed at him in amazement. And then somewhat aghast at himself, he burst out of the room.

A look of blank incredulity rested on Potter's face. He looked at Mr. Bundy's chair as if he did not quite realize that the man was no longer there. Then at length he turned to Margaret, an explanation upon his lips.

But Margaret merely laughed.

The ridiculousness of the scene dawned upon him. Bundy had taken him so much by surprise that for once in his life he had been left speechless, and now when words came, there was no one to say them to. Margaret had assumed the rôle of a mere interested spectator.

But there was no way of throwing down his poise. He rose with dignity, his face a shade more crimson, but otherwise unruffled, and strode out of the office with an air that would have done credit to a Grand Duke.

But the bitter gall was in his mouth. In a moment of error he had let her see behind the curtain of his soul. And when she had laughed, he knew the illusion was gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FEVER-HEAT

MARGARET was beginning to find out now that the decision Mr. Kimball would make either in favor or against financing her enterprise was assuming the proportions of a crisis in her life. If he agreed to furnish the capital, she would then have carried her career to a height of success of which she had never dreamed in her earlier days. She scarcely dared even to think of it, so dazzling was the prospect. On the other hand, if he declined to furnish it, he would automatically put a barrier in her path that would take many a day to surmount. For the very fact that so shrewd a man as Kimball had taken the prospect under consideration and had decided against it, would be a red flag of warning to other investors.

Her first mood of confidence had changed to one of disturbed uncertainty. She was an accused person awaiting the verdict of the jury. Every yellow telegram that came into the office of Bundy and Son

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sent waves of excitement through her until she knew its contents. Every long-distance telephone call aroused in her a breathless interest until she found that it was not for her. The pile of mail in the morning and again in the middle of the afternoon had a diabolic magnetism for her. She could not rest until she had run through it, looking for the envelope with the familiar mark upon it.

But there was no word. Telegrams came, long-distance messages punctuated the business of the day, bushels of letters were opened, discussed, worried over, answered, and filed. But among them was no sign that William Kimball of Pittsburgh was alive.

She wrote him letters—one almost every day—but she did not send them. Their final destination was the bottom of her waste-basket. Sometimes she felt that a telegram might be the right medium through which to extract information from him. But when she had the message written it seemed too anxious in its tone. And no matter how anxious she was, he must not know it. He must be led to consider her in the entirely fictitious rôle of a light-hearted, undisturbed lady who would like to have him invest his money in her enterprise, but

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did not consider it at all paramount that he should do so.

Eventually, of course, word must come from the man. He could not go on being William the Silent forever. The day on which that word did come at last was the very one following Potter's visit to the office. The telephone, which had borne to the office so many far-away voices that had no news of great import to tell, this time bore the voice of William Kimball. And Margaret herself was at Bay City.

Bundy was wild with anxiety. Kimball wanted to talk to Margaret herself and would leave no message. Bundy tried to explain where she was, but was so disturbed by the importance of the occasion that it is doubtful if this conversation was entirely intelligible. However, he managed to explain that he would try to get a message to her and have her call him.

But the message was ill-fated. It came to the factory at Bay City after she had gone. She was then on the train. It would be three hours before she would be back in the office. She had waited many weeks for the news—she must wait three hours longer.

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The three hours proved to be just a little too long. When she arrived at the office and tried to get Mr. Kimball by telephone, he could not be found. She tried in every possible way to discover him. But nothing could bring him to light. From all appearances, Pittsburgh simply did not contain him.

After an hour or more of this, she found at length some one at his house who vouchsafed the information that he was not expected home until the following morning. She went home at that, carrying suspended sentence with her. If she had been anxious before, she was doubly anxious now. But her anxiety was tinged with vexation that she should have chosen this day, of all the days, to go to Bay City.

"I don't see how you can be so calm about it," said Dora. "I shouldn't be able to sit still."

"I'm not calm about it," Margaret exclaimed. "I am on pins and needles."

She was sitting at the piano. She began to play softly. It needed soft and restful chords to quiet the furore of subdued excitement within her—excitement at the thought that perhaps the great moment of her life was near at hand—the moment that would realize her dream of success. Why should

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the excitement not have been strong within her? They had told her that Mr. Kimball would not return until the morning. There was nothing to do but to wait, her soul keyed up and her mind in a tumult of unrest.

And this was the night that David chose. He could not by any circumstances have chanced upon a time less propitious for him. In coming, he pitted himself against the fever-heat of the other side of her life. If there was ever a time when he would have been crowded out, it was at that moment.

Of course, he did not choose the moment. It was the time the fates picked out for him. He was on his way to his island, and he had so arranged his journey that he would be able to see Margaret as he was passing through the city. When his ring sounded, Margaret turned toward her companion.

"That," she said, "is David Bruce."

"How could it be?"

"He said he was coming soon. I have a feeling that this is he."

The maid passed through the hall. Dora listened.

"You were right," she said.

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But David sensed no excitement in the air. The reason women are made beautiful is so that you will not see beneath and guess what they are thinking. Margaret rose and shook hands with him. Dora looked at him keenly. Everything was as usual. He did not feel the concert-pitch.

"You have grown," Dora remarked, "since I saw you last."

"I am still five feet ten and weigh a hundred and sixty pounds," he said.

"I don't mean that way. I mean you are older. You have some lines at the corners of your mouth. Perhaps you are growing up."

He walked to the mirror over the mantel and looked at his mouth critically.

"Would you consider them a blemish?"

"No. I rather like them," she said.

After a decent interval, Dora dutifully left Margaret with him and ascended the stair. Margaret, who had been listening rather absently to the conversation between the other two, rose from the piano stool. He noticed her high color and bright eyes, but did not attribute them to excitement.

"When are you going to your island?" she asked, quickly, in a now-I-must-talk manner.

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"To-morrow."

"Aren't you afraid that there will be another rise of the river?"

He could see she was making conversation.

"I have never heard of such a thing," he replied.

"Neither have I. Some one suggested the possibility yesterday, however, and I happened to think of it again."

"Are you tired?" he asked.

She had been standing by the mantelpiece, staring at the hearth. His speech seemed to make her actually aware of him for the first time. She raised her eyes to his and smiled.

"Why, no," she replied. "Do I look tired?"

"I thought you were rather absent in your talk—as though you had something on your mind."

She dropped into a chair.

"It has been a trying day. I have had so many things to think about. I think my brain has a kink in it."

"I wonder it hasn't a kink in it more frequently," he said.

A passing electric automobile rang its bell just outside the window. It sounded unusually loud. Margaret started.

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"Your nerves are in bad shape," he said, surprised.

"I thought it was the telephone."

"I can give you a prescription for that tired, nervous feeling," he remarked.

A light of mild interest appeared in her eyes.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Is it something you have to take?"

"Oh, yes." He hesitated. "You take a train—to begin with."

"I took one to-day before lunch and another before dinner."

"Oh, well. You took too many trains. Your system wasn't able to assimilate them."

"David, you're so foolish."

"No, indeed, I'm serious. Now, as I say, you are to take a train—and stay on it until you get to Bay City."

"Oh, dear me. That wouldn't cure me."

"I haven't come to the cure yet," he asserted. "Upon arriving at Bay City, you proceed at once to the river. There you step into a canoe and go due east."

She played idly with the fringe of the table cover.

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"Am I alone all this time? I'm timid about stepping into canoes."

"Not necessarily. Some other fellow—the Bruces, for instance, are sometimes nervous—might also be anxious to take the cure."

"I am relieved. Go on."

"You thereupon proceed, as I say, due east, and take the first island on the left."

"Will my system readily assimilate an island?"

"I mean select the island," he asserted, stiffly. He paid no attention to her smile. "And upon this island—it is really the only one, so you need not be afraid of missing it—grow five tall trees noted for their medicinal properties."

"At last," she exclaimed, "we are coming to the cure."

"Their value," he continued, "lies in their soothing influence alone."

"But how about this companion I am to have? I am fussy about people. If I didn't like him, a whole forest full of trees couldn't cure me."

He gave the matter thought.

"I don't know whether you would like him or not," he replied, at length. "But he would like you, if that would help the matter any."

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"That always helps," she said. "How do you know he would like me?"

He waited until she glanced up at him and looked squarely into her eyes.

"Don't you think he does?" he asked.

She took off her ring and played with it idly.

"How should I know?"

"Isn't there anything inside you that tells?" urged David.

She pursed her lips doubtfully. But inside her something was beating a little faster. New emotions were rising in her. The sound of his voice and the personal nearness of him seemed to take hold of her—to push gently backward the things that had been martialled in the front of her mind. The excitement of a while ago over a thing that might happen was giving way to an excitement over something that actually was happening.

The ring she was playing with dropped to the floor. He rose to pick it up. She was reclining luxuriously in a leather-cushioned Morris chair. He sat upon its broad arm and took the hand on which the ring belonged. She watched him curiously. He held the hand for a moment and then slipped

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the bit of jewelry down upon her little finger, where she was accustomed to wear it.

"Thank you," she said.

The hand lay upon his knee.

"Are you through with this?" she asked, raising the fingers of it and letting them fall.

"Never," he said, in a low tone.

Her glance met his fairly. He saw the color deepen presently in her cheeks. He wanted then to loose the hand he held and take her into his arms.

"Margaret," he said.

She knew the meaning in his voice. She felt her heart throbbing. But she looked up at him calmly.

"Yes," she answered evenly.

The telephone bell rang. She felt his eyes upon her. His hand was gripping hers. If she saw any determination in him then to take her in his arms, her only feeling was to wish that he would. The telephone bell rang. She sat up rigidly, realizing then that it was the telephone bell. She sprang to her feet, her hand still in his.

"Let me go," she whispered. "Please. *Please.* It's very important. It's for me."

He released her and standing up, paced up and down the room. She ran to the telephone. All the

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excitement of the early evening returned to her. Her hand trembled as she held the receiver to her ear. She said "Hello" and a voice told her to wait.

Dora ran down the steps. She glanced at the figure sitting motionless at the telephone.

"It is a long-distance call," she told David, confidently.

David, hardly comprehending, nodded his head. Margaret said "Hello" again and waited. Dora went closer to her as though she expected to see over her shoulder what was going on on the wire. Presently Margaret said "Hello" again.

"Yes," she continued. "This is Miss York." There was a pause. "Yes, Mr. Kimball," she said.

Dora gasped excitedly. There was a long buzzing on the 'phone which Margaret punctuated here and there with a murmured "yes." At the end of it she said, "I understand." Another buzzing. Margaret said, "I will do it to-morrow." A short buzzing followed, and Margaret said "Good-bye." Dora was wild with curiosity.

"That was the most unsatisfactory telephone conversation I ever listened to," she exclaimed.

Margaret beamed.

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"It was the most satisfactory one I ever listened to," she said.

The other woman caught both her wrists.

"You don't mean he ——"

Margaret sank into a chair.

"He is tremendously enthusiastic about the whole scheme. He says he does not think there is a doubt that he will put his money into it. But he is anxious to try a few more experiments and wants me to send him more of the turpentine. But he assured me that he is most favorably impressed."

"Bully," cried Dora.

David sat down on the bottom step of the stair near them.

"Is this your Pittsburgh man?"

Margaret looked up, her eyes bright with excitement.

"Yes," she exclaimed.

"I congratulate you," he said, heartily. But he saw that the spell, as far as he was concerned, was broken. Her head and her heart were too full of other things. He rose, with an assumption of calmness he did not feel.

"I know," he observed, "how I should feel if I had gone through such a trying day. You must be

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dog-tired. I am going to clear out and let Miss Garnet send you to bed."

Dora shot him an approving glance, but Margaret looked at him quickly, a strange light in her eyes.

"Good-night," he told her.

She held his hand tightly.

"Good-night," she said.

The door closed behind him. She sat still, gazing at her hands clasped before her.

"You are a pretty picture of enthusiasm," remarked Dora, presently.

Margaret roused herself.

"Who said anything about enthusiasm?" she asked.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE INVISIBLE FORCE

TWO weeks passed by. Kimball had relapsed into silence again, and Margaret was endeavoring to match his caution with an equal amount of patience. Patience, however, was an acquired virtue and not at all easy for her to maintain for a long period. When she wanted a thing she could not be easy in her mind unless she were actively striving for it. The delay, therefore, was trying on her nerves.

It had been raining for two days now, and a melancholy distaste for the world seemed to have seized every one. The rain beat upon the window panes and washed down like waterfalls. Visitors dragged streaming umbrellas and dripping rain-coats through the outer office of Bundy and Son until it looked as if some one had been washing wagons there. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, but the day was so dark that they were burning lights to see. Margaret was tired.

Old Scaggs entered, enveloped in a gloom that

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seemed to be an actual pleasure to him. These melancholy, graveyard days stimulated his soul and fixed more firmly in his brain the comforting thought that the world was a mournful place and every one else just as low in spirits as he was himself.

"You had better get all your freight off on that four o'clock boat," he asserted, gloomily. "The river's rising."

Margaret turned around in her chair.

"How do you know that?" she asked.

"Just been down to the wharf. The water's about a foot higher than it ought to be at this tide."

"You had better be on the safe side, then. Get an extra team, if you think it is necessary."

"I don't see how there can be another high water," she said to Mr. Bundy when Scaggs had gone.

Bundy shook his head.

"Maybe all the snow hasn't melted," he replied, vaguely.

At four o'clock Scaggs reported that all the freight had been put aboard the boat. At five minutes after four a messenger boy in a black rubber slicker brought a telegram for Margaret.

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The mechanism of her heart stopped and then went on at double time.

She signed the book in a tremor of excitement, and slit open the envelope with her finger so quickly that the two acts were part of one operation. The date line, "Pittsburgh," seemed to jump up from the paper as she spread out the sheet and endeavored to read the whole text at one glance.

The message read :

"Will finance operation per arrangement already outlined. Samples exceed expectations. Quick action necessary. Am leaving for London five to-morrow afternoon. Meet me New York, McAlpin Hotel nine A. M."

Margaret stared at the yellow paper for a full minute. Then she banged the call bell that sat on her desk. Bundy jumped.

"Now what?" he exclaimed.

"Going to New York to-morrow."

She showed him the telegram. For the next half hour things happened in the office. Margaret always liked to feel that without her Bundy and Son would cease to exist, yet she knew perfectly well that the organization worked so now that things ran along smoothly in her absence. She

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delegated all her work to other hands—and arranged things so there would be no loose ends left that no one knew how to take care of.

“There’ll be plenty of time on our hands anyway to-morrow,” observed Scaggs. “The boats aren’t going to run.”

“Pooh!” she replied. “You’re a pessimist, Scaggs. If the rain stops by to-morrow ——”

A sudden gale of wind hurled the storm cracking against the window panes. She rose and looked anxiously through the glass. Presently she put on her raincoat and her rubbers and, taking her umbrella, went out on the street. The sidewalks and the streets ran with water. She did not go home, but ploughed through the storm to the water-front. The river, as far out as she could see in the driving rain, was racing by, yellow and angry. Limbs of trees and debris swirled around in its eddies. It was noticeably higher. A skiff that had been made fast to a ring in the piling of the wharf had risen above the ring and the rope was pulling the bow under water. She noticed that all the sailboats and gasoline launches were tied up at the wharves, and that even the tugs were not venturing out.

She went home and changed to dry clothes. At

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seven o'clock just as they were about to sit down to dinner, she called up the steamboat office and found the river had risen eight inches since five o'clock. She sat down at the table, but ate very little.

"Why are you so excited about this?" asked Dora, wonderingly.

"David is on his island."

The other woman laid down her knife.

"Well, he certainly can take care of himself."

"I don't know that he can. Nobody could manage a canoe on that river. With all that debris floating down, it's too dangerous to take out a tug."

"Surely the Sawyers would think of him without being reminded."

"They would if they were there. Perhaps they have not returned."

The dinner proceeded in silence.

"I think I will telephone," Margaret said.

She went to the instrument and asked for the number in Bay City. The operator promised to call her. At the end of fifteen minutes she had not called her. She went to the telephone again. The operator said they were having difficulty in getting Bay City. After another wait the bell rang and Margaret was given the information that Mrs.

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Sawyer was out of town and her telephone had been temporarily disconnected.

She returned to the table.

"Certainly he wouldn't stay out there in all the rain we have had yesterday and to-day," observed Dora.

"That would not bother him. He has a weather-tight house and an oil stove. He would rather enjoy the storm."

The maid brought coffee. Margaret stirred hers mechanically. Dora gazed at her keenly and in her own mind arrived at a certain conclusion. But she said nothing about it.

"Wouldn't some one naturally go after him?" she inquired, instead.

"I doubt if he knows any one in Bay City who would be aware that he was out there."

There was a silence for a while, and then Margaret looked up.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" she exclaimed. "I'll call up Evans."

She went to the telephone once more. There was a long wait. She visited the instrument again impatiently. Finally she was informed that the wires were down and it was impossible to get connection with Bay City at all.

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"Now you've done your best," said Dora, "I shouldn't think about it any more. David Bruce is certainly capable of taking care of himself."

Margaret did not reply, but set about getting ready to take the night train for New York to keep her appointment with Kimball. She put on her very best suit and her very best hat and many other things that were best. She believed firmly that prosperous clothes were a business asset, and she dressed more carefully in preparation for a business conference than she did for a formal dinner. She packed her little hand-bag and laid out her raincoat and umbrella.

"Are you going on the ten o'clock train?" asked Dora.

"Yes."

The other woman held both her hands.

"Don't stay away long. This place is a barn without you."

Margaret kissed her.

"Be back Thursday," she replied.

But they said no further word about David.

At half-past nine a taxicab took her to the Severn Street Station. As she waited for the train, she heard people talking about the high water. The

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river had risen three feet since half-past two in the afternoon. It was still raining.

The train pulled in. She went with the crowd out to the wet platform. The Pullman conductor in his rubber coat and rubber covered hat recognized her and took off his hat.

"Bay City sleeper in the rear," he said.

She stood still in the rain looking at him.

"I would give a thousand dollars if I could take it," she found herself saying, and then stepped aboard his car.

She did not go to bed when the train started. Instead she sat down by a window at the end of the car and looked out at the rain. She had not realized until just then that she wanted to go to Bay City. She was able to convince herself when she reasoned it out that David would certainly take care of himself, as he always had. Her business was of too unusual a nature to permit of any halt. If she missed this opportunity, it would be months before such a chance would come again. It might never come. Now was the most important moment of her life.

This was the reasoning that disposed summarily, and apparently without chance for appeal, of her de-

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sire to help him. But as the train came nearer and nearer the point beyond which it would be impossible for her to alter her plans even if she wanted to, she found herself torn by an unexplained agony of doubt. Something told her that the man was in danger on his island, and no amount of reasoning could drive that feeling from her heart. A new, a strange, an unbelievable bond held her, and an uncanny consciousness of disaster was in her mind, as if the power had been given her to think the thoughts of this one person afar off.

She tried to reason herself into believing that David must be safe—that he certainly would not have allowed himself to be caught out there in the middle of the river. But the cold logic of it was that that is just what he almost certainly would have done. He would scarcely have left his island simply because of the hard rain, since he knew that the usual spring freshet had come and gone. He would not have been able to guess that this was the one year out of a hundred in which there would be two freshets. So the chances were that he would have sat tight in his little house until he saw the danger, and then it would be too late to escape it. For when the rise of the river surrounded him and the water ran wild

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with great trees and logs and sections of wharves and all the unrighteous plunder it had stolen from its new banks as it swept on, there was no chance for such a shell of a boat as a canvas canoe, even were a man strong enough and wily enough to keep the craft on its course.

Of course he would be able to take refuge in one of the trees; but she had seen trees uprooted by the current and carried on, as if they had been but twigs. Furthermore, how much exposure of that sort could a person stand? Supposing the freshet had surrounded him and forced him to take to the trees at five in the afternoon, he would now have been there more than six hours, and if he were taken off no later than noon the next day, he would have been through a period of exposure and cold trying to the constitution of the strongest man.

In her business Margaret knew two kinds of risks—one the risk of losing where the chances were in favor of winning and where if one did lose the loss was more than made up by success in some other quarter. This was business. Bundy and Son took risks like that every day—in fact, every time they purchased a new lot of goods. The other kind of risk was the sort in which if the man lost he lost

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everything—that is, for instance, the risk of loss by fire and the risk of bankruptcy. A prudent business person did not neglect fire insurance nor did he spread his capital out too thin. For if he did and lost—he lost everything. That was the sort of risk a man could not take.

Margaret had before her a risk. She could go on to New York under the assumption that David must be able to take care of himself—she could take that chance. The question was—was this one of the risks she could afford to take?

There was no thought in her mind of deciding what was her personal relation to David. She had simply jumped across that whole process of thought, when she had allowed the fear of possible danger to him to interfere with her peace of mind and to shake her decision on the very eve of great success. It did not occur to her to decide why she wanted to give aid to him. She simply wanted to do it.

The only question she was trying to decide was whether she could give that aid—or rather whether she could afford to withhold it. Could she leave David Bruce and go to New York to reap the fruits of her labor? The train rolled out upon the long bridge over the West Branch, running slowly.

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Something like a hot coal burned in her breast. This was her last chance. In three minutes there would be no deciding. It would be too late.

Below her in the ribbon of light from the car windows she saw the yellow, eddying river, racing into the darkness. The sight of it fascinated her. She could not sit still. She rose and went out into the vestibule between the two cars. She looked out through the panes of the door. She saw the same turbulent, tumbling waters.

The brakes ground on the wheels and the train stopped at the station on the far side of the river. The porter, who came through and opened the vestibule door to go down on the platform, noted that she was very pale, and looked at her again. She held her hands firmly clasped. A jar ran through the train telling her the Bay City sleeper was being removed and shifted to a siding.

It was but a few seconds now, and they would be gone. A shout sounded on the platform. The bell-cord above her grew taut and then flapped noisily on its supports. The porter waved his lantern. The engine puffed, a jar ran through the train and the cars began to move.

It was the last half-second. She saw the platform

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begin to slide by ; saw the porter with his hand on the guard picking up his stool. And when she saw the platform move, and realized that it was her last half second, she grew cold all over.

"It's no use. I can't do it."

A sudden fright seized her. Would the man let her off? She dashed down the steps. Her only thought was to leave that train. The porter held both handles.

"Quick," she cried. "Let me off."

He hesitated. She struck at his wrist as he still held the bar. The train gathered speed. In a frenzy of excitement she shouted to him, hardly knowing what she said. He gazed at her for a moment as though doubting her sanity. Then he lifted her bodily from the car and set her down on the wet platform and, running after the steps, swung himself aboard the fast-moving train.

The cars rushed by, leaving her standing alone in the downpour. She watched the green lights on the rear of the train, growing smaller and smaller, and then fading into the rain. She pressed her lips together.

"Good-bye for that," she said.

CHAPTER XXX

THE YELLOW RIVER

SHE sank down upon the wooden bench, crushed and disappointed. All her hopes and ambitions were on the train—and she was here alone. She had paid a heavy price, but it was for the comfort of her soul. She knew from the present quiet beating of her heart that she would have paid a greater price had she remained upon the train. At first she had thought it was a sort of heroism that had made her turn back; but now it was apparent that of two things much desired, she had relinquished the lesser.

Her plan of action she had mapped out while fighting the question over on the car. The train to Bay City left at four o'clock. It was now midnight. She would have time to cross the bridge over the river, with the object of finding John Sawyer's motor boat if it was moored there. That he still owned it she was sure, for she had seen him in it a few weeks before running by the factory at Bay City on his way up the river. In such weather as this it

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would scarcely be in use. The chances were that she would find the boat anchored to its buoy. If it were not, she would have time to return and take the train.

She rose, and taking advantage of the solitude of the station platform, pinned her skirts up from her ankles, and buttoned her raincoat tightly about her. She took off her hat and gazed at it doubtfully. If she left it, she ran an even chance of never seeing it again. If she wore it, it would be ruined. The hat was a spring creation and was made of straw. This was a time of war and no place for sentiment. She calmly tore off the trimmings and pulled the naked and ashamed straw bag down over her hair. She stuffed the roses and ribbons carefully into the pocket of her raincoat.

In doing this she discovered a small electric flash-light in the pocket. It was the property of Bundy and Son. They used it to look at things in dark corners of the stock-room. At first she could not figure out how it happened to be there ; until she remembered that she had taken it in the afternoon when she had gone across the alley at the rear of their building to a little structure in which they stored gasoline.

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She was now ready to start. If any one is of the opinion that crossing over a quarter-mile bridge upon a twelve-inch plank on a rainy, dark-as-the-pit night such as that was, is a pleasant prospect, he is mistaken. Margaret shivered and stood upon the brink for a long while before she put her foot upon that board.

The weather had now settled down to a steady, dismal drizzle. Without the aid of the flash-lamp it was impossible to distinguish between the foot-board and the crevices on either side of it. She adjusted the little switch that kept the light burning all the time, and walked grimly ahead. She maintained afterward that it would not have been nearly so nerve-racking had she not been thinking at every step that she might have to walk back. She could hear the gurgling of the water running under the bridge, which brought up thoughts of the distance of the foot-board above the flood.

Margaret pressed on doggedly. Every pier she came to she thought must be the opposite shore. After she had crossed about five of these she came to the conclusion that the bridge must run on forever. She tried to see ahead into the night, but the flash-light was blocked by the falling rain. Her

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hat dripped with rain. The rain ran from her coat upon her shoes, which oozed with water as she walked. But only one thing made any difference. If the bridge would only come to an end! Presently she stumbled and nearly fell. Her heart was in her mouth. But she discovered that the reason she had done so was because she had stepped unexpectedly upon the stone ballast of the track at the far shore.

After that, nothing mattered. She felt that she could go through anything at all. Steep banks, darkness, mud, rain, water underfoot—all seemed like safe mediums of progress compared to the bridge. She found that the path by the river which she and David had walked along was flooded. Wherever possible, therefore, she walked among the trees higher up; and where it was not possible, she waded in the shallow water on the path. This made progress slow. She was so long about it that she was afraid she must have passed the spot where the little boat ought to lie.

"One thing is certain," she said, turning the flash-light upon herself, ruefully; "if I do not find the boat, I shall be a heartrending spectacle to go to Bay City by train."

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And just then she stumbled into the chain that moored it. She swung her light out into the stream and there, riding comfortably on the water, appeared the dim outline of the motor boat.

She could have shouted in her excitement. She found the key in its hiding place and unfastened the lock that held the chain of the small boat. The water here was not running so swiftly as out in mid-stream, but it was passing by too rapidly for her to make the launch from that point. She caught the boat by the painter and dragged it up-stream about thirty or forty yards. Getting in, she seized the oars and pulled straight out from the shore. The current caught the boat and carried it down. She pulled with all her power. Her electric flash caught the launch coming toward her at great speed. She took one mighty pull at her oars and then ran to the bow. Almost immediately the boat struck the buoy to which the launch was moored, swung around stern foremost and, side scraping side, shot by like lightning.

More by instinct than as the result of any presence of mind, she grasped wildly at the larger craft. Her arms encircled a brass belaying pin, and her fingers caught the ledge of the gunwale. She

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leaped while there was yet time and sprawled upon the deck, half aboard and half overboard, while the little boat scudded on into the darkness.

She struggled to her feet and stumbling through the darkness—her flash lamp having gone downstream with the smaller boat—managed finally to get the tarpaulin jacket off the cockpit and to enter the cabin. Here presently she found matches and lighted the lamp there.

With due regard for her clothes, she now took off the outer and more fragile layer of these and deposited them with care upon the locker seats. Her beautiful suit had been well protected beneath the raincoat. Her shoes and stockings were soaked. She hung them up by the engine where they would dry when it was started, under the supposition of course that she would be able to start it. Out of the locker she got a sweater, a pair of woolen socks, unworn but many sizes too large, a pair of rubber boots, an oilskin slicker and sou'wester. She soon appeared in all this regalia. She considered the question of a pair of corduroy trousers, but postponed decision.

She found the gasoline tank of the engine nearly half full. She stood before the machine thought-

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fully and recalled the manner of starting it, as David had expounded it. The starting of a healthy gasoline engine is a simple matter, if one remembers to turn on the switch. She turned on the switch—not with the care-free abandon of an experienced machinist—but gingerly, as if she conceded the possibility of a destructive explosion following the operation. She waited. All remained calm; and she attacked the fly-wheel. It turned a quarter turn and stopped as if against a rubber cushion. She tried again with the same result. The machine was very temperamental. It required coaxing. She did not make the mistake of losing her temper with it and hurting its feelings. She coaxed it amiably, soothingly, but withal in a determined manner, thus gaining its respect and confidence. And the engine, absorbing her amiability, at length swallowed the rubber cushion, thus allowing the wheel to turn over, and was immediately seized with a great fit of coughing, which presently seemed to fall into the regular motor-boat purr, as the wheel turned on regularly and swiftly.

After it had been running a few minutes, she switched on the electric lights in the cabin and on deck. There were four on deck, the red and green

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running lights, the light at the little mast head astern, and the light of the revolving search lamp.

The engine was now running free. She cast off from the buoy and then running below, turned the lever that threw it in gear. The propellor caught the water. The launch headed straight for the shore and destruction. She threw herself upon the wheel and rolled it over. The boat made out into the river, caught the current first abeam and then astern and raced down-stream with power and current behind it.

The difficulties of plain motor-boat management are not the difficulties of automobile driving. In this case her problem was to steer the craft along a waterway a quarter of a mile wide instead of along a twenty-foot road. And there was not the necessity of stopping and starting and dropping into second speed or first speed or any of the long ritual of tricks made necessary by land conditions. The engine of the launch started, she had only to keep it going generally ahead and have patience. Both of which things she felt she was capable of accomplishing without undue difficulty.

Had it been daylight and the passing shore visible, she might have been frightened at their headlong

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pace. But she could see only the water beside her, and from that it appeared that they were merely running comfortably along.

The rain came down steadily. But it made no difference at all to her. She was so encased in oil-skins that it ran off her in streams as if she had been a duck. She made herself as comfortable as she could, for she knew she had a long journey before her. She got the search-light in working order and was able to see things about her sufficiently well so that there would be no danger of her running ashore. Other than that slight amount of steering, there was nothing for her to do for the next few hours but to sit still and let the engine and the current carry her on.

It was a long, lonely three hours. The deadening murmur of the storm and the incessant discharge of the engine blotted out all other sound, just as the night blotted out all the world about her. She could see nothing but the deck of the launch and a little path of water before her where she cut into the darkness with her search-light. It was as if she were ploughing ahead alone through indeterminate space—an orbitless star, floating, for all eye and ear could tell, midway between heaven and earth.

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Now and then she would run past objects floating in the water—limbs of trees, boards, boxes, and dark, strange forms that seemed like creatures blocking her path. By the time she sighted them, she was in the midst of them and there was no opportunity to turn aside. It was like shooting rapids. But none of the objects was large, and when the launch struck them it swept them harmlessly aside.

It was about half-past two in the morning when she first began to be conscious of a glow in the sky off the starboard bow. This was Bay City. She was weary. Her legs ached from standing by the wheel. Her eyes burned from watching the beam of the search-light. Even when she closed them, she still saw a red stripe before her. Her fingers were stiff from cold and from grasping the wheel. In spite of her loss of sleep, however, she was unnaturally wide awake. She realized that nervous energy was covering up her fatigue.

The launch ran on. The glow grew into a great patch of light. For the first time she began to be conscious of a shore line. The city appeared like a long strip of milky way with here and there a star twinkling through it. She hardly noticed the swiftness with which she came into view of it and sped

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by it. Had it been daylight and had she been able to see the eddying, muddy, headlong current running away with her boat, she might not have retained the calm that now possessed her. But she was not yet aware of the speed at which she was going nor of the dangers of the turbulent waters.

Ahead she caught the flash of the lighthouse that marked the channel at the point where the streams of the two rivers joined. The light seemed to be coming at her with the speed of an express train. Steering straight for it as she knew she must, her eyes became dulled from looking at it. She lost her sense of distance and was shooting right at the iron structure before she knew it. A quick turn of the wheel threw her off her course, and she shot by the lighthouse, the side of the launch scraping the iron supports as she passed.

Almost immediately she was in rough water. The current from the larger river struck her abeam. The boat rolled, and the exhaust of the engine was now muffled beneath the water and now exploding with redoubled force above it. She could feel the craft straining under her. She looked astern and found the lighthouse was slipping up-stream. At this rate she would soon be out in the bay.

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She threw over the wheel and began to fight diagonally up-stream. Her only hope lay in keeping a course due east from the light, for that was where the island lay. If she missed that line, she missed her only chance, groping about blindly as she was in the darkness, of reaching her destination. It was a trying situation. Straining her eyes into the night she could see nothing. The beam of her search-light showed only a short path of falling rain and of onrushing water, and seemed to stop then as though against a wall. Behind her lay the lighthouse, her only star of hope.

She determined not to swerve from her easterly course. She deliberately placed herself with her back to the bow and kept the light due west astern by the compass. It was an approximate operation, but it was her only hope. The launch was now making progress somewhat like a fiddler crab, her bow pointing southeast to offset the force of the current and her general direction being east. The search-light was pointing in the direction from which the island was expected to appear.

Presently she was startled by hearing, as the engine muffled itself under the waves, a shrill call, such as a man makes whistling through his fingers.

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She started and it seemed that her heart stopped beating for a minute. She cried out unavailingly. She whirled the search-light about, but could see nothing in the night. At greater risk than she knew, she shut off her engine and listened again. She seemed to feel the current lift the boat bodily and carry it down-stream. And then the shrill whistle sounded again.

She strained her eyes, and there, dimly against the glow of the city, floated into view, as she was carried by in the current, the shadowy silhouette of the island trees, growing out of the water.

She had missed the island and run by it on the south, and was now on the far side of it. She threw on the switch and turned over the wheel. The engine was hot and started immediately. It seemed as if it would never be able to check the headway the current had given them. She saw the shadow of the trees moving and moving up-stream. Presently they stopped moving. Gradually the launch began gaining a little upon them. That was all that was necessary. She turned the wheel a little and the boat, holding its own against the current, headed slowly toward the trees.

As they became more distinct, she threw her

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search-light among them, and there, sitting on a sort of platform of boards protected by a square canvas, sat a figure that seemed very much like David Bruce. And a voice that was very much like his voice hailed her. And, as the launch worked nearer, a figure that was his beyond a doubt stood in the glare of her search-light.

He shouted directions to her over the noise of the engine, and presently he caught the bow of the launch and made it fast to the trunk of the tree. With a huge, flat, tarpaulin-covered bundle under his arm, he lowered himself to the deck. She turned to shut off the engine. Her journey was finished.

She rose, and to her astonishment found herself in his strong embrace.

A wave of great excitement swept over her. The rain fell gently, pattering on the deck, and splashing on the limbs of the trees; the water rolled swirling by; the bright light of the search-light glared steadily ahead. A minute passed—and she found she had uttered no reproof.

CHAPTER XXXI

STRAW-GRASPING

PRESENTLY they went in out of the rain.

There were a thousand things to be told. Each wanted to know the history of the other and each wanted to know it immediately. But she would say no word of her adventure until he had told her about his. He explained briefly. He had been working—he did not say at what—inside his little portable cottage, and had been so absorbed that he did not realize that the high water was coming until about five o'clock, when he opened the door and found the island almost completely submerged. He had then waded through the water to his canoe and dragged it back to the house. There was no chance in the world for a canoe in that water, so he had made it fast, and taking the awning that protected the entrance to his cabin, rigged up a sort of shelter in one of the trees, on a platform he had built there some time before. He had wrapped up

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his work in a waterproof package and taken it with him. He had also taken all the food in the house. By this time there had been a foot of water over the floor. He had not hoped to save the house, and presently a log of wood, coming down in full cry on the breast of the stream, had gone right through the walls as if they were paper. At nine o'clock that night every piece of it had gone down into the bay.

He had been cooped up on his little six foot square platform from nine o'clock on. At midnight he had seen the Baltimore boat, six hours late, coming up from the bay. Its flash-light had rested directly upon him and he had waved and shouted, but no one had seen him. He had watched the boat make the landing and simply waited with a dull patience, trying to take an interest in speculating whether it would tie up at the wharf or go back to Baltimore.

And then he had seen the lights of Margaret's launch and hope had grown in him that the craft was coming for him. When she had passed close to him above the island, he had recognized the launch and had put his fingers to his mouth and whistled—the only signal he could make. And when she had worked the boat close to him, he had recognized her at once even in the dim light.

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"But how," he asked, wondering, "did you get the launch?"

"I got off the train—and stole it."

He studied her face intently.

"Was the train held up again?" he asked.

"No. I was going to New York and—I was worried about you."

"Why were you going to New York—if I may ask?" he said, at length.

"Oh—just to see a man."

He frowned in a troubled sort of way. She knew he was slowly piecing together the story of her adventure.

"What man?"

"Don't nag me, David dear. It was Mr. Kimball."

He squared his shoulders.

"One more question, please. When can you see him again?"

"I don't know," she replied, hesitating. "He sails for Europe at five o'clock to-morrow."

"I see what you've done," he said, finally.

He stood there for a moment looking down at the floor. Then he strode out into the rain. Her ambitions were his own ambitions. He was anxious

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to have her succeed—not because that meant money to her but because he wanted her to accomplish what she had been striving for. And now she had given that up to come to his assistance. Her pluck and courage in coming made him fiercely proud of her, but he was sorry that she had not gone ahead and accomplished her mission. He would have been doubly glad to have taken his chance alone against the storm and tide rather than have her give up her chance of success. Yet his heart was swelling with pride that she had given it up for him.

He must square the debt somehow. Since she had sacrificed herself for him, he must strain every nerve in a great endeavor to give her back what she had lost. He must get her to New York in time. Gigantic undertaking for a man stranded in the midst of a roaring flood a mile from the nearest shore. But there lay the Baltimore boat at the dock.

Presently she was aware that he had cast loose and that they were drifting down-stream. He came into the cabin and threw in the switch to start the engine.

“What time does Kimball sail?”

STRAW-GRASPING

"Five."

She laid her hand on his arm.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"If that boat over there runs, I am going to have you in Baltimore to-morrow morning. You will be in New York in time."

He put all possible power into the engine and headed the boat, as fast as it could run with the current abeam, directly for the lights of the steamer they could see in the distance, lying at the wharf—or rather that David could see, for it all looked like a blur to Margaret. But he had seen the steamboat make the landing and its position was engraved on his mind.

"Do you think she will run?" she asked, excitedly.

"I know she will run. The boat was delayed by fog to-day. But there is no fog now. She must get back to Baltimore as soon as she can. She is probably loaded with freight now."

"She may leave any minute then?"

"Any minute," he replied.

Never had that launch seemed so slow. Apparently, miles of water separated them from the lights of the wharves. And the steady running of

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the little boat seemed to bring them no nearer. She would have said they were anchored where they were, if she had not known they were running free. There was nothing they could do to help it along. They had simply to be patient and wait.

Presently, when it seemed that they actually were making progress and they had come so much nearer the city that she could distinguish the shore and the big boat lying at the wharf, the long finger of a search-light shot out from her pilot house.

"Look at that," David growled.

"What does that mean?"

"It means that she is going to start. But we still have a chance," he added, desperately.

He tried to turn a little more power into the cylinder, in a sort of forlorn hope. Shoreward they heard the boat blow three long blasts on her whistle. He sank down on the seat and held the wheel in one hand.

"That's all," he said.

The white light swept the river, the jingle of the engine bell floated over the water, and the steamer slid slowly out from the wharf. They were now about half a mile away. If they had had five minutes more, they might have made it.

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They sat dejectedly, watching the big craft creeping toward them. David at length rose.

"We'll make one more trial," he said.

He cut down the gasoline flow in the engine, and turned the launch's bow down-stream. The current caught them and carried them along at a wild pace. Now and then the search-light of the big steamer astern moved over the river and rested on them for a moment. The rain had stopped, and it was possible to see more clearly the world round about. But in contrast to the lighted city ashore, they were running into pitch blackness ahead. If there were any place where the world shelved off and dropped into bottomless space, Margaret would have said it was right there out in that darkness. She did not understand what he was about to do, but there was such an air of absolute desperation in his face that she did not dare to ask him.

They were right in the path of the oncoming steamer. She could see it dead astern, growing larger and larger. Now she could hear the pounding of its engines, and see the cloud of black smoke blown shorewards from its funnel. The search-light still felt about along the shore and the water, and now and then rested inquiringly on the little launch.

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"They will run us down," she cried.

"Anything to attract their attention," was all he said.

Two hoarse blasts burst from the siren of the steamer. The boat was so near that it seemed to tower above them like a mountain. David seized the lanyard of a pneumatic whistle. Its shrill tones split the night. He held doggedly to it.

"They'll have to stop," he cried.

"To take us aboard?" she asked.

"Yes."

She gazed at him in astonishment.

"But what will you do with the launch?"

He took a fresh grip on the whistle lanyard.

"Cut it adrift. I'll buy John two like it if we get aboard."

The search-light of the steamer was on the launch. And then she heard the stroke of the engine room bell. The engines of the big boat stopped. A dozen or so heads appeared below at the gangways. The bell struck again. The big screws reversed, churning the water.

"Take us aboard," shouted David, between his hands.

The steamer slid gently alongside. A line was

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thrown out which he made fast. Margaret looked up at the row of curious faces at the gangway.

"There is one of the laborers at our factory," she exclaimed, hardly knowing what she said.

"Which one?" asked David, quickly.

She pointed him out. Then she dashed in for the clothes in the cabin and was lifted, bundle and all, up to the deck. David followed, with his own package. He turned to the man Margaret had pointed out and put a yellow twenty-dollar bill in his hand.

"Take that boat ashore for Miss York," he said.

Without hesitation the man leaped in and cast off the line.

The bell rang in the engine room. The screws began to turn. The water piled up at the bow and foamed along the sides. A jingle of the bell below. The engines started to pound and the steamer plunged ahead at full speed.

CHAPTER XXXII

EVEN

AT seven o'clock the next morning Margaret awoke. But the bedraggled, wet, booted boy-girl who had entered the stateroom the night before never left it. A maid, an electric iron, needles and thread, shoe polish, whisk brooms and a little hard work combined to dispatch that lady without shrift and to substitute for her the identical Margaret York who had boarded the train the night before bound for New York—roses on her hat, lustre on her shoes, creases gone from her suit, lace and linen smooth and white. She surveyed herself contentedly in the glass and went out on deck. David was there. She smiled when she saw he had undergone a similar transformation.

"I know," she said, surveying him approvingly, "that you must have had a new suit of clothes in that precious bundle of yours."

"Not at all," he replied. "I borrowed a clean collar from the purser."

EVEN

"But what was in the bundle?"

He looked at her fixedly.

"That was our future livelihood."

"Ours," she repeated. Then she said it again as though fixing the idea in her mind.

He smiled. They had wandered up to the upper deck and were sitting abaft the smoke-stack—a position very conspicuous from points along the distant shore, but secluded as far as the boat itself was concerned. He took her hand. She looked up at him with a pretense of astonishment in her eyes, and a faint, provoking smile on her lips. He seized her in his arms and—glorious privilege—kissed her lips.

"You feel you have the right to do that now whenever you want to?" she asked, presently.

"Yes. Don't you think so?"

She took off her seal ring and slipped it idly on his finger.

"Perhaps you have," she replied.

The boat ploughed on. The smoke from her funnel hung low over the water, and a wide path astern marked the road over which they had traveled.

"When you marry me——" he began.

She raised her brows in surprise.

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"Oh," she exclaimed, "am I to do that?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"I hadn't been asked," she explained. "I didn't know about it."

"It's all settled."

"Thank you," she observed.

"You are an imp," he asserted. "I'll ask you now. Will you marry me?"

"Are you a good catch?"

"The best there is. I am good-tempered, understand and obey when spoken to in English, French or German, would not beat or throw anything heavy at a lady unless provoked, earned thirty-five hundred dollars in the past year ——"

She took his chin in her hands and turned his face to her.

"What was that last statement?" she asked, wonderingly.

He repeated it. Her eyes grew bright.

"How did you earn it?" she asked.

He told her the whole story, ending up with the disclosure of the contents of his precious package.

"I am proud of you," she said.

A long while afterward he said :

"I was about to ask you some time ago whether

EVEN

in event of my marrying you you would still continue in your business."

"No," she replied, immediately.

She gazed out at the wake of the ship, far astern.

"My business," she went on, "has been an important and absorbing thing to me. I do not give it up without regret. But I know that I want you"—she slid her hand through his arm—"and all that you will mean to me—more than I want the business. I am giving up the lesser for the greater."

She paused. His hand closed upon hers.

"I would not lay this down as a course for every one to follow," she said, presently. "But it is what I want."

He drew her closer to him.

"I am sorry that you have to make such a sacrifice," he said in a low tone.

She did not speak for some time.

"I am not so sure," she replied, "that it is wholly a sacrifice. Success in business is a selfish aim. I might grow to be as self-centered and mechanically inhuman as Mr. Potter. His business sense is not diluted by any such deleterious ingredients as kindness, consideration and love for his fellow-men. And he has grown that way by centering every

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thought, every ambition, and every energy upon business alone. He is the extreme example. But I might be proceeding in that direction."

She rested her head against the sleeve of his coat.

"And," she whispered, "there is no danger now of my home being a mere temple to my success, as poor Dora's is, with nothing in it she can love."

The whistle above them blew twice. She started; but he held her tightly. A little tug ploughed by. The man at the wheel looked curiously at them, but they saw neither him nor his craft.

He drew her closer to him.

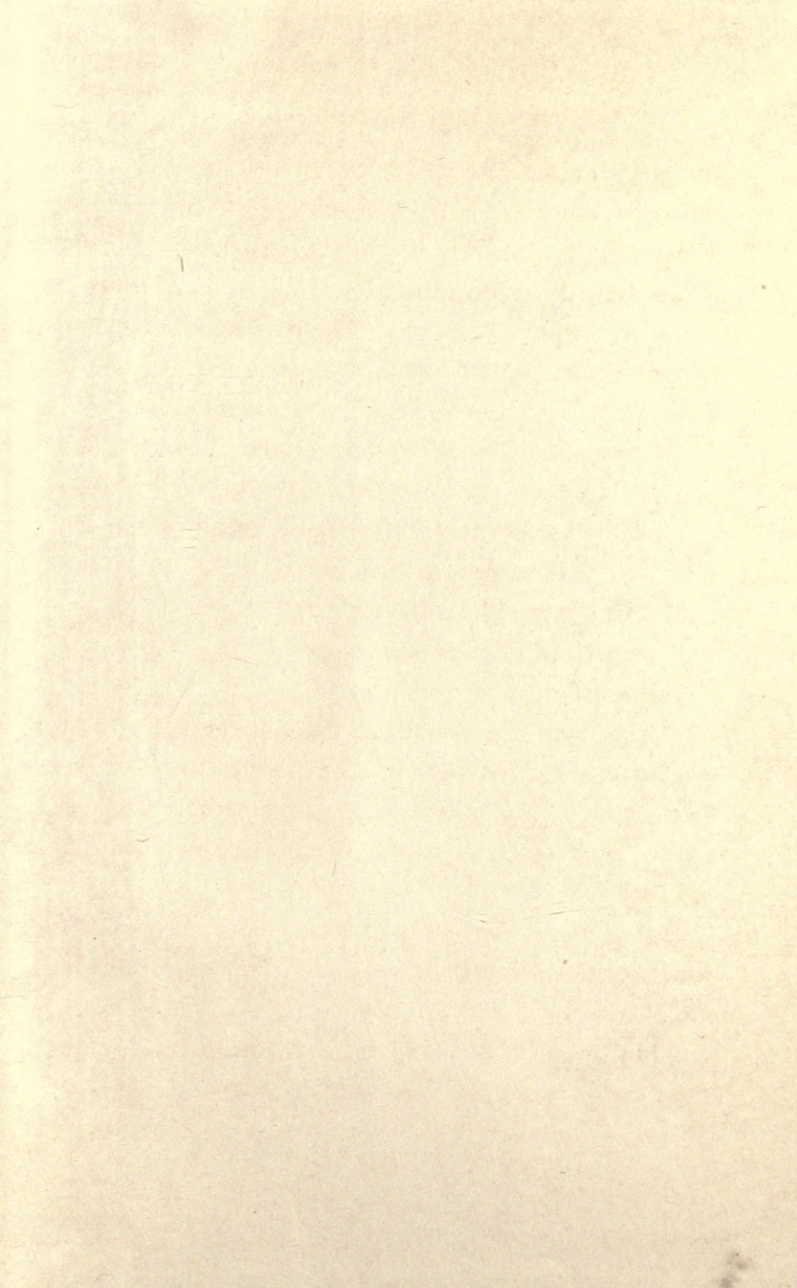
"That's the kind of wife I want."

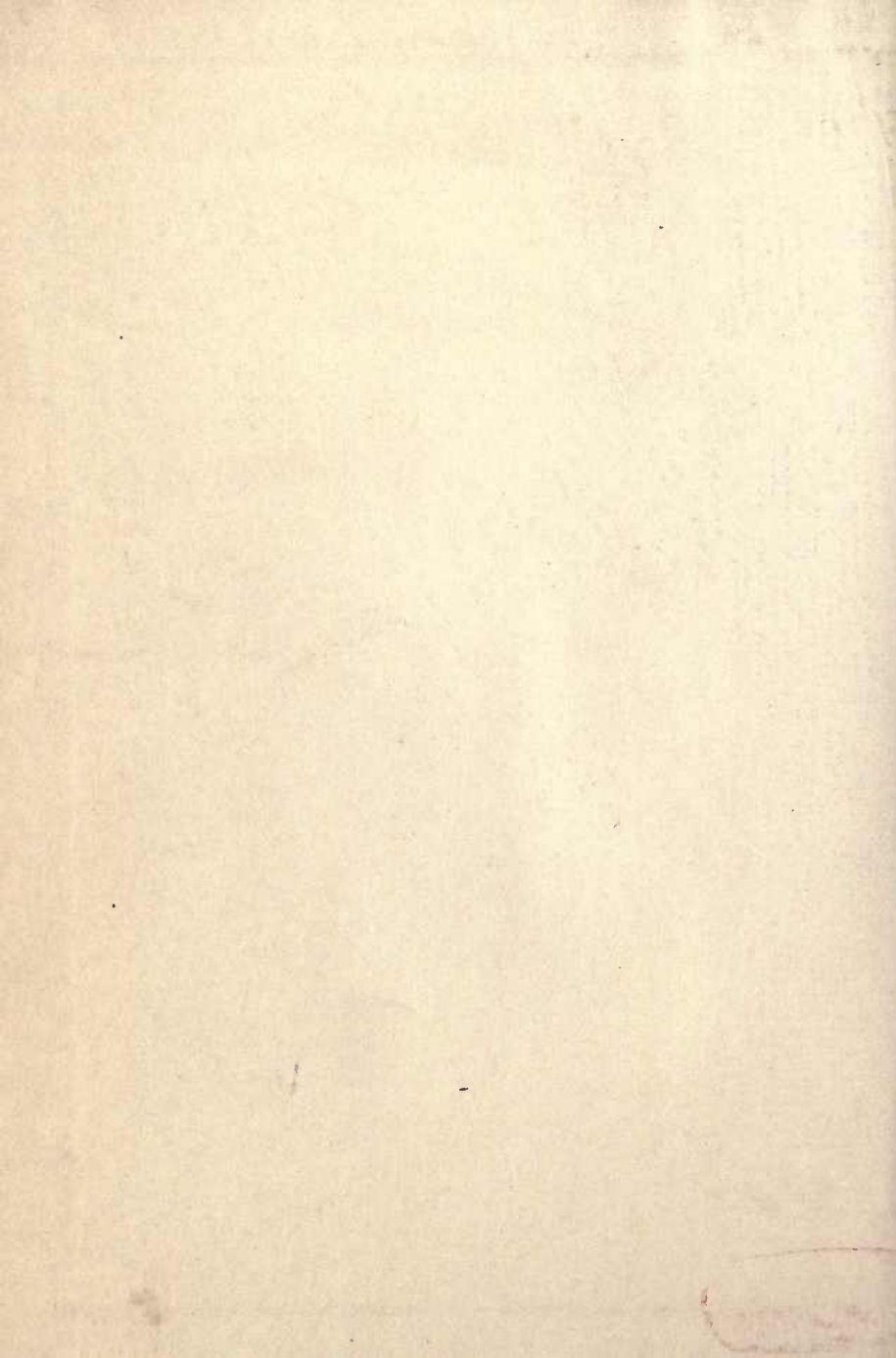
Presently he said :

"Since you are giving up your business life, I am glad your last shot is to be on the bull's-eye. This boat gets to Baltimore at eight o'clock. You can be in New York by one. You will see your man after all."

Her eyes shone with excitement. Then a softer look crept into her face. She glanced up at him, smiling.

"My man?" she said, with a whimsical gentleness. "I am seeing him now."





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